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## JAMES MASON

In Carol Reed's "Odd Man Out," one of the greatest British films ever made, Mason gives the best performance of his career. His moving portrait of the doomed Johnny McQueen ranks with the work of Henry Fonda in "Strange Incident," Michel Simon in "Panique," and Jean Gabin in "Le Jour Se Léve." Mr. Mason is forthright, outspoken and unconventional. There is a study of him, entitled "The Fabulous Mason" on page 44, and a detailed review of "Odd Man Out" by Julia Symmonds appears on page 52.

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# film quarterly

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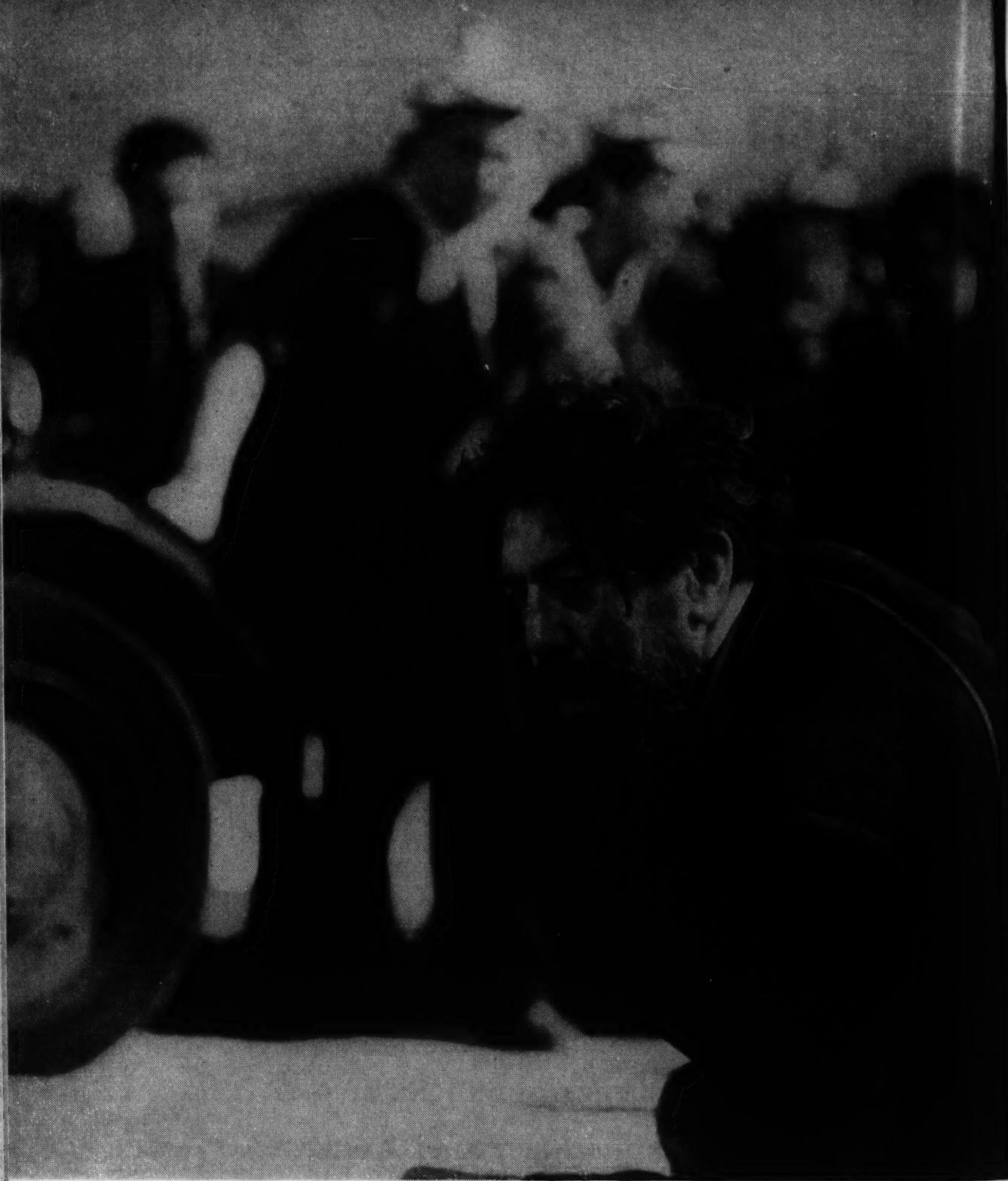
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edited by Peter Noble

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**Cover :** **BETTE DAVIS**, Hollywood's "First Lady of the Screen," has twice won an Academy Award, for her work in "Dangerous" and "Jezebel." She admits that she will not stop until she has three "Oscars"; and it is likely that she will accomplish this soon. When Bette first went to Hollywood in 1931, Universal, to whom she was under contract, regretted their decision immediately they saw her in "Bad Sister." After two more films Bette was allowed to drift into that Hollywood No Man's Land inhabited by actors without contracts. She was rescued by Warners, and her fifteen years association with this company has brought her to her present eminence. Best remembered for her outstanding performances in "Bordertown," "Dangerous," "Of Human Bondage," "Jezebel" and "Dark Victory," Bette has recently given one of her best screen portrayals as Miss Moffat in "The Corn Is Green," and as the vain and stupid Mrs. Skeffington in the film of that name. Following "Deception," she took time off to have a baby. Her husband is William Grant Sherry, ex-pugilist turned artist. Miss Davis, one of the most considerable artists in the cinema, is the subject of a forthcoming book by Peter Noble.



*Photo : London Films*

## " PANIQUE "

**MICHEL SIMON** as Monsieur Hire in Julien Duvivier's masterpiece from the story by Georges Simenon, whose " Temptation Harbour " and " Monsieur la Souris " were recently shown in London. The above scene occurs at the end of the film when the innocent M. Hire is hounded to his death by the hate-crazed mob who believe him to be the murderer of an old lady. This sequence ranks among the most terrifying ever seen on the screen, comparable with the lynch scenes of Fritz Lang's " Fury " and Mervyn LeRoy's " They Won't Forget. " " Panique " marks Julien Duvivier's return to the top rank of film directors.

# preamble

by the editor

THE life of a film is all too short. A brief West End run is usually soon followed by a provincial release and a two-weeks' release period in London and districts. After that the film disappears from view. Occasionally it may come to life again at a repertory cinema of which there are only a dozen in London and a few in the provincial towns, but for the most part some of the most worth-while films are relegated to a Wardour Street cellar for ever. Perhaps a far-seeing official of a film producing company may decide to bring out a film, dust it off and reissue it, but unfortunately most re-releases seem to be only of second-rate films, and rarely indeed are we treated to a second showing of a great screen classic.

This is a sad state of affairs. Great art in all forms should be brought continually to the attention of the public. Classic literature may be read by all who have access to the free libraries of the country, famed paintings, drawings and sculpture are to be seen at galleries, public exhibitions and museums. Classic drama is available to lovers of the theatre, and at progressive playhouses in London and the provinces may often be seen the great plays of past eras. Yes, the work of Shakespeare, Congreve, Jonson, Shaw, Ibsen and O'Neill is to be seen even at the present time on the London stage, but what of the great names of the cinema, the illustrious artists of the film? Where is one able to see the past creative work of the screen classicists like René Clair, Chaplin, Milestone, Dreyer, Fairbanks, Duvivier, Stroheim, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and the more modern Frank Capra, John Ford, Marcel Carné, Carol Reed, Orson Welles, Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock—to name but a few?

The answer is that their films, milestones in the history of the cinema, are rarely seen today, except at occasional private shows by enterprising private film societies. Would it not be a sad thing if we found ourselves debarred from enjoying the plays of the great dramatists of the world, or if we were suddenly prevented, for some reason, from reading Dumas, Dickens, Proust or Mark Twain? Many of us feel much the same way about being deprived of seeing some of the most brilliant and lasting work of the great names of the screen.

Repertory cinemas are doing excellent work in presenting regular programmes of past successes but even they only manage to skim the surface of the wealth of cinematic treasures which have accumulated in the last fifty years. Today we are sometimes—though not often—able to see films made as far back as 1935–36 but rarely indeed do we witness the really great movies of the 1920's. In this direction we lag far behind the U.S.A., which has a far more intelligent attitude to the film as an art form. For example, a current film programme at the Museum of Modern Art in New York includes Douglas Fairbanks, Snr. in *Thief of Bagdad*, Rudolph Valentino in *Monsieur Beaucaire*, John Barrymore in *Beau Brummel*, and Erich von Stroheim's *Greed*.

Where in England today is it possible to see regularly the films of these, and other great names of the silent era, or, for that matter, the great films and names of any other era except the present one? Echo answers "Where?"

In London we have the National Film Library of the British Film Institute with a considerable library of films from all countries and periods. Surely the B.F.I. could emulate the Museum of Modern Art and give *regular* showings of outstanding examples of film-making in the last thirty or so years? What is needed is a Central Repertory Cinema with a definite educative policy. There is a generation growing up which scarcely knows Chaplin, Griffith, Stroheim, and whose knowledge of the cinema starts with Bing Crosby and Betty Grable and ends with Donald Duck. This could surely be remedied—and certainly should be, at once.

And if we want the film to be universally recognised as one of the most important of the arts it is up to us to support and encourage cinemas which pursue a repertory policy. No film should be condemned to a bare few weeks of life followed by oblivion. It is not fair to director, writer, actors—and audience. May we hope that the time is soon coming when shortage of film output in London and Hollywood will necessitate the lengthier exhibition of current films and encourage the constant re-showing of past artistic successes. This will encourage the growth of repertory cinemas—we may even have one in every district. These coupled with the Central Repertory Cinema, where unusual, foreign and rare films may be seen for a season, would ensure that the illustrious names of motion picture history will be kept constantly before our eyes. Then the film will begin to take its rightful place in the cultural life of the people. Instead of a drug it will become a stimulant, accepted as one of the most important of the visual arts.

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# The Genius of Fritz Lang

by HARRY WILSON

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HOLLYWOOD is usually fatal to European film directors : rather like those rare botanical specimens which, transplanted from their native soil, wither and die. The "Roll of Honour" is long and dismally eloquent : Murnau, Dupont, Seastrom, Eisenstein (who, however, survived to start again in his native Russia), Pabst : all went to America with brilliant reputations and Hollywood contracts, to fade into obscurity and final oblivion.

Fritz Lang is a rare exception. He went to America, an exile from Hitler, in 1934, and apart from a bad patch in the late 'thirties, he has never looked back. Today, he is at the height of his extraordinary powers : one of the few creative artists left in film production.

Lang was born in 1890, in Vienna, where as a youth he studied architecture. He ran away from school, and went to Munich, Paris, and travelled all over the world. During this time he supported himself by selling hand-painted postcards, and drawing political and humorous cartoons for magazines and periodicals.

He was in Paris when the First World War broke out, and he managed to escape back to Austria, where he enlisted in the Austrian Army, serving first as a private, and later as an officer. At the front he was wounded and decorated for bravery. The last years of the war he spent as a patient in military hospitals, slowly recovering from war wounds. Ill and dissatisfied, he began writing short stories, and jotting down ideas for screen plays and sequences, and in the words of Otis Ferguson, the American critic, unconsciously became one of the first film scenarists : "When the movies were just a clumsy, struggling art, there were men everywhere who knew, somehow, that this was the sort of work they wanted to do . . . "

Discharged from the Army as unfit for any form of military service, Lang obtained an introduction to Erich Pommer, then German film production chief No. 1. Pommer immediately recognised the value of Lang's ideas and enthusiasm, and engaged him on the spot as scenario writer, actor, and general odd-job man. Success came slowly at first, and not even Pommer seemed aware of the talent which was later to develop so astonishingly. Lang's first work was writing scripts which were filmed by others, notably Joe May, renowned German director of his day, who was later to go to Hollywood, there to languish in obscurity. Occasionally, Lang acted in the productions of his own screen stories, but generally he was dissatisfied with the realisation of his ideas.

In 1919 he wrote an original story called *Halb-Blut* (Half-Caste), the story of a man destroyed by love, which Lang sold to Decla on



Photo : Universal-International

**JOAN BENNETT**, star of "Scarlet Street," is photographed with director **FRITZ LANG** on the set at Universal Studios. The film was one of Lang's greatest Hollywood successes, and one of the best American films of 1946.

condition that he himself was allowed to direct it. Decla agreed, and Lang was launched on his career as film director.

Later the same year he wrote and directed *Die Spinnen* (The Spiders), in which for the first time he introduced the idea which was later to colour so much of his work : the idea of a master-criminal organisation bent on usurping world power, and which seeks to overthrow organised society by a campaign of terror and sabotage.

It was not until 1921 that he directed his first really important film. *Der Meude Tod* (The Weary Death) was shown in England and America as *Destiny*, and it is a tribute to Lang's genius that it can still today be seen, without embarrassment, by a modern audience. It was the forerunner of a style of film-making which was to become known as the German school of mysticism and death.

Douglas Fairbanks Snr. was so impressed with the film that he bought the original negative outright, but did not release the film until several years later. Instead, he adopted many of the trick shots and processes first evolved by Lang and his technicians for his forthcoming fantasy *The Thief of Bagdad*. As Lang tartly puts it : " Naturally, having much more money and technical resources, he improved on them tremendously."

In 1922 Lang made the first version of his famous melodrama *Dr. Mabuse—Der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse—The Gambler), from an original story by Lang and Thea von Harbou, who had meantime become his wife, and who was to provide the inspiration for his ideas

(continued on page 16)



*Photo : M.G.M.*

A powerful scene from Fritz Lang's first American film "Fury," made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1936. "Fury" was a terrifying and much-praised indictment of lynch law, but M.G.M. dropped Lang soon after it was shown.

Lang's second Hollywood film was made for Walter Wanger, the forthright and progressive producer who made "Blockade" in 1937. The above scene shows **HENRY FONDA** as the embittered jailbird forcing his way out of prison by holding up the doctor, **JEROME COWAN**. Like "Fury," "You Only Live Once" is now considered an American classic.

*Photo : United Artists*





*Above* : **DAN DURYEA**, as the pimp, and **JOAN BENNETT**, as the lady of doubtful virtue, in "Scarlet Street," produced for Universal-International in 1946 ; "a brilliant, sordid study of the individual overtaken by the consequences of lust and folly."

*Below* : **RAYMOND MASSEY** and **EDWARD G. ROBINSON** in a scene from Lang's "The Woman In The Window," (which was in a sense, a rough cut of "Scarlet Street," which came later).

*Photo : R.K.O. Radio*





*Photo : Universal-International*

## "SCARLET STREET"

**JOAN BENNETT** and **DAN DURYEA** in a scene from Fritz Lang's best film since "You Only Live Once," made ten years ago. "Scarlet Street" brings back Lang to the position he once held in the European cinema; a fine, though sordid, piece of cinema, it brings pleasurable anticipations of "The Secret Beyond the Door," (in which Joan Bennett and Fritz Lang again collaborate as star and director).

(continued from page 12)

for many years to come. In it, the master-criminal motif, first suggested in *Der Spinnen*, emerged in the round as Dr. Mabuse, the King of Crime, who tries to impose the anarchy of criminality on the whole world. The film strongly reflected the current mood of national hysteria and violence of post-war Germany.

*Die Nibelungen* (1923-4) based remotely on the Wagner "Ring" legend, was Lang's most ambitious film to date. With this tremendous fantasy-cycle, his world reputation as a director of the front rank was firmly established. Notable for its colossal sets and awe-inspiring background, fantastic architecture, and pervaded by a genuine mysticism and feeling for the past, this film inaugurated what was to become known as the Golden Age of the German Cinema.

Lang went to the U.S.A. in 1924, and immediately fell under the spell of New York. Fascinated and yet frightened by the skyscrapers and the famous skyline, he returned to Europe with the idea for his next film already taking firm shape. *Metropolis* (1926) was the outcome, and this film has a peculiar significance for today. Lang's vision of the future was apocalyptic. He foreshadowed the triumph of the modern, totalitarian state. *Metropolis* was the story of the revolt of the Underground workers of a great slave-city against the machine controllers, who in turn, support a non-working leisure class in luxury and idleness.

In his next film, Lang returned to the earlier theme of crime and criminals. *Spione* (The Spy) added yet another rogue to the gallery. This time, the theme of sabotage against organised society, suggested in *Der Spinnen* and developed in *Dr. Mabuse*, was carried a stage further by the introduction of such spectacular devices of melodrama as train wrecks, car chases, complex disguises, and a new subtlety of characterisation (the double-crossing Japanese diplomat who, realising he has himself been duped by the master-criminal, commits suicide).

Lang's last silent film was, technically, his most ambitious. *Frau Im Mond* (The Woman in the Moon) visualised a rocket trip to the moon. Production time exceeded three months. Considerable scientific research was done, models and special sets built (technical advisers on the production included Professor Oberth, who was later instrumental in the development of the German rocket weapon V2), including the creation of such remarkable effects as the lunar landscape seen from the interior of the space-ship. There was also a magnificent sequence depicting the rocket's departure, which for sheer realism remained unsurpassed until *Things to Come* in 1936.

During the transitional period between the passing of the silent film and the advent of sound, Lang immersed himself in a study of the technique and potentialities of the sound film. *M*, his first sound film, was sensational in its grasp of the new medium. Many critics consider this to be his finest film. It is, at any rate, his own favourite. The title means, simply, *Murder*; and the film dealt with the notorious Dusseldorf child murderer, who was responsible for a series of vicious killings of small children in the early 'thirties. Peter Lorre played the murderer, fat and slug-like, victim of a habit he could not break, and under Lang's powerful, intuitive direction, became the

first film murderer with sympathy and a psychological background. Lang's approach to the murderer-victim situation was completely unsensational, almost clinical. Graham Greene has said of this film that as a study of the mind and conscience of the murderer it was like " looking through the eye-piece of a microscope, through which the tangled mind is exposed, laid flat on the slide : love and lust ; nobility and perversity, hatred of itself and despair jumping at you from the jelly."

By 1933, like everything else in Germany, film-making was becoming a matter of party politics. The industry was being ruthlessly purged of Jewish elements, which meant that the cream of German film talent hurriedly emigrated elsewhere : to England, France, and Hollywood. Those who remained were compelled to toe the party line. Lang felt the time had come to sound the warning note.

Ostensibly a sequel to his earlier *Dr. Mabuse*, Lang made the first anti-Nazi film by putting the nihilistic philosophy of the Nazis into the mouth of the now insane Dr. Mabuse, who from within the asylum controls a vast network of crime and sabotage, aimed at disrupting human society by a process of terror, blackmail, and destruction, until society is forced to turn to the wreckers for salvation. It was a novel theory, and one on which Lang employed all his genius for melodrama. It was notable, too, for its imaginative use of sound and silence in the creation of an atmosphere of terror and suspense. In the whole of cinema there has been nothing to equal the menace of the opening shot : a camera panning round an empty store-room, to the accompaniment of the subdued but insistent throb of hidden machinery ; or the scene, later, in the flooded cellar, where rising waters and tick of hidden time-bomb combine to create an atmosphere of almost unbearable tension.

*Dr. Mabuse* was promptly banned by the Nazis, and Lang was summoned to Berlin by Goebbels. Goebbels told him that Hitler had been " very impressed " by *Metropolis* and *Dr. Mabuse*, and offered Lang the post of head of the German film industry. It is to Lang's eternal credit that he refused the offer, and the same night he left Germany for good, leaving all his possessions behind.

Lang made one film in France : *Liliom*, Molnar's lyrical fantasy of flirtation in heaven, with Charles Boyer as the philandering Liliom, whose earthly life is unfolded to him, in newsreel fashion, upon his arrival in heaven : a most unusual theme for Lang, light-hearted, gay, inconsequential, with a fine satiric flavour ; and one more proof of his versatility. Ernst Lubitsch thought enough of the idea to use it for his fantasy *Heaven Can Wait* ten years later.

In 1934, Lang was signed up in London by David Selznick, then executive producer for M.G.M. Like many others before him, Lang was kept hanging about in Hollywood, kicking his heels, for nearly two years, writing original screen plays that were somehow never produced (his scenario based on the " Morro Castle " disaster was a case in point), and studying American production methods before he was allowed to direct his first film. *Fury* (1936) was a sensation, a terrific indictment of an unpleasant, all-too-common facet of American civilization : the brutal " justice " of the lynch mob.

No one who saw it could forget any detail of this sombre, memorable story of an innocent man lynched by a mob of respectable small-town citizens. Marred only by the absurd "happy ending" (foisted on the film against Lang's wishes), the film was as near perfect a piece of work as the cinema has given us: one of the greatest films of our time.

The consequences of *Fury* were almost as savagely ironical as the film itself. M.G.M. failed to renew Lang's contract: options were allowed to lapse (Hollywood's old-fashioned way of indicating to an artist that he has failed), and he was virtually cast into the wilderness. *Fury* wasn't "box-office": Metro preferred safe, comfortable family epics like *David Copperfield*, and historical travesties like *Marie Antoinette*. Never very keen on *Fury*, Metro sold the film outright two years later to a minor distributing company.

*You Only Live Once* (revived recently) and *You and Me* (1936-7), Lang's next two films were, in a sense, complementary to *Fury* in that they carried the sociological argument, the passionate defence of the under-dog, a stage further. Lang's strong sympathy for the criminal, his pity for the fugitive, was most evident in the former film, in which he showed how society, after punishing the wrongdoer, hounds and ostracises him, driving him to further excesses.

His ambitious sociological trilogy played out, Lang found himself unemployed for a time. Then, in 1940, Darryl Zanuck rescued him from temporary obscurity, and in quick succession Fritz directed a couple of routine Westerns, *The Return of Frank James* and *Western Union*, both notable for their imaginative use of colour and strong suspense values.

It was inevitable that Lang, with his hatred of the Nazis, would make an anti-Nazi film. He directed three in a row: *Man Hunt* (the story of the big-game hunter who accidentally gets Hitler in his gunsight, but fails to pull the trigger because, to his hunter-psyché, Hitler is a "dead-pigeon" already); *Hangmen Also Die* (the story of the assassination of Heydrich, and its consequences for Czechoslovakia); and *The Ministry of Fear*, from the novel by Graham Greene. This latter was a startlingly objective account of the methods of the Fifth Column in wartime London, and contained many passages of fine, imaginative direction. There was, in particular, the climax, in which, after he has been identified and cornered, the chief fifth columnist is shot, standing (so it seems) on the right side of a closed door in a darkened room, while shots are fired outside, until, as he drops dead, the daylight is seen through the bullet holes in the door.

It must be admitted, however, that Lang is not at his best with the London scene. Both *Man Hunt* and *The Ministry of Fear* contained many embarrassing *faux pas* of atmosphere and local colour. He is much happier in urban New York (or any large American city), the background of his next two films: *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*. The former was, in a sense, the rough-cut of the later film. Similarities of plot aside, the two films are remarkably complementary. They express all that is inherent in Lang's work: the conflict of the individual with his conscience, and with society (of which he has always been conscious), carried to its logical conclusion in the anti-social



*Photo : United Artists*

**ANNA LEE** as a member of the Czech Resistance movement in "Hangmen Also Die," Lang's film about the assassination of Heydrich ; it was a powerful anti-Nazi picture, and better than most of the other Hollywood productions of this genre.

Another of Lang's anti-Nazi pictures was "The Ministry of Fear," adapted from the novel by Graham Greene. **HILLARY BROOKE** and **RAY MILLAND** are seen below in a sequence from a film which was "a startlingly objective account of the methods of the Fifth Column in wartime London."

*Photo : Paramount*



act in which the instincts, stifled and repressed for too long by the conventions of urban society, find sudden, violent, tragic expression.

The sociological undercurrent, submerged in Lang's middle, routine American phase, emerged strongly again in *Scarlet Street*, a brilliant, sordid study of the individual overtaken by the consequences of lust and folly, haunted by the tortured figures of the German cinema of the twenties : Jannings, Kortner, Veidt, Fritz Rasp : victims of remorse and conscience. Lang, his ideas having turned full circle, returned in *Scarlet Street* to the basic problems of good and evil, the conflict of guilt and conscience, which first preoccupied his powerful talents twenty-five years previously.

Unpredictable as ever, in his latest film to be shown in England, *Cloak and Dagger*, Lang abandons completely the sociological theme for a straightforward thriller. Put plainly, *Cloak and Dagger* is a thick-ear, blood-and-guts melodrama, with portentous trimmings about the atom bomb ; but Lang (and purposely) never gets within miles of discussing the implications of the bomb. He is much happier with the search for the missing formula (which is what, in essence, the film boils down to), the race against time between two contesting teams of scientists as to which can make the world's biggest explosion first.

In this strictly limited field, and for Lang the territory is so familiar, he knows every signpost, every landmark, he is powerfully at home : the whispered conversation with the stranger at the opera ; the photographer at the airport ; the beautiful German agent ; the heroine assuming nonchalance in the doorway while a life and death struggle with guns, knives and fists goes on behind her ; the car which refuses to start at the frontier post, while the curious guards stand, impatiently, by. All this and the undercurrent of violence and betrayal, the brutality of the fight scenes (Lang has a tendency, first noticed in *M* to dwell on the details of physical cruelty), punctuated by revolver shots and last-minute *volte-face*, are the familiar properties of melodrama which Lang has manipulated with a brilliance amounting to genius for twenty-five years. This is elementary, even for his early UFA days. *Cloak and Dagger*, although it suffers by comparison with *The House on 92nd Street* and *13 Rue Madeleine*, which derive from the documentary approach and gain realism thereby, does not even begin to extend Lang's powers. True, it is a fine, workmanlike thriller ; unquestionably his technique is as polished as ever ; the tension never slackens : is so terrific, in fact, it is a relief when the film is over ; and Lang compels interest in the principals and their ultimate fate simply by the sheer force of his direction. These things apart, *Cloak and Dagger* is a disappointment, coming after such fine case-book studies in abnormal psychology as *Scarlet Street*, and acute sociological analyses as *Fury*.

The chances that an artist can equal so consummate a work as *Fury* are extremely remote, but that Lang, in his maturity, is capable of producing something as good was abundantly demonstrated by *Scarlet Street*. Whether his next film, tentatively entitled *The Secret Beyond the Door*, proves to be anything more than another routine thriller, it is too early yet to say ; but we shall see.

# solid cinema

by oswell blakeston

ONE of the most remarkable strips of film ever screened was slipped recently, without ballyhoo, into a newsreel. This sequence was taken by a camera tied to a rocket ; and one saw, for the first time, a picture of—the rim of the world. I, a staunch flat-earthist, was left gasping from air. I admit I was shaken.

Well . . . if we don't start soon to think more seriously about solid cinema, we'll all be gasping when it does arrive ; and solid cinema may be with us, whether we want it or not, sooner than a great many people suspect. Are we, the ciné-lovers, going to allow solid cinema to shake our faith, or are we going to be ready to accept it as a new and richer experience.

Looking back, on the last six months of film-going, one might be inclined to feel satisfied with the present good—*Boomerang*, *Odd Man Out*, *Best Years of Our Lives*, *Great Expectations*, etc. So it might strike some of us as rather wilful to turn men like Siodmak and Billy Wilder out of the blue train in which they are travelling, and put them back in the desert to fight again the pioneer battles for a new sort of cinema. But then we won't be asked what we think, and even the Wilders won't be asked. If the "powers" decide that we're to have solid cinema, we'll have it.

It's quite easy, in our present position of ignorance, to imagine all sorts of reasons why we might disagree with solid cinema. It's harder, and therefore more rewarding, to try to think of some of the good that solid cinema might do.

The possibilities have been examined, with sensitive insight, by that brilliant cinéaste, Dallas Bower. Ten years ago, Bower published *Plan For Cinema*. Like the staggering rocket sequence in the newsreel, Bower's book slipped into the publishing programme without much ballyhoo ; and, in spite of its exceptional suggestiveness, it did not set celluloid on fire. Bower, naturally, was a prophet ahead of time ; but time itself is now the prophet. We have not long to catch up with Bower if we are to be able to deal with film solids. Let us, therefore, recall what Bower can tell us.

In his exciting and neglected book, Bower suggested a special kind of solid cinema. Roughly (very roughly) the photographed image is, as it were, divided into four sections—that is four synchronous cameras are arranged in a square and shoot into the scene. The cameras are synchronised so that if one moves (pans, etc.), the others move in relation to it. Then the theatre for projection is circus-type ; four synchronous projection machines, arranged in a square, throw the four films, taken by the four cameras, simultaneously into the arena. The images are caught by a cylindrical optical-stopper (say celluloid) which is not opaque—that is the "optical-stopper" will act as a screen

to show the image but will be of a material which can be seen *through*. In this cylinder, then, the four sections of the original image are, as it were, welded together. again.

This "plan for cinema" would give the audience not solidity but the illusion of solidity. Each member of the audience would have his individual viewpoint of the spectacle inside the cylinder. A spectator could move his head and see round a corner of the scene. The film would be no longer a postage-stamp in a fixed frame.

So much for Bower's mechanics. Solid cinema may not come in this disguise, although the technical experts have assured Bower that it could. What is potently relevant—the conclusions which Bower draws from his circus-arena cinema.

Solid cinema—when the audience can peer round corners—forces the film director to emphasise "what" is filmed rather than "how" it is filmed. For example, jazzing over defects with tricks of ultra-rapid montage would, on the solid scale, be too violent a shock to the physical system of the spectator. Montage, in solid cinema, becomes the mechanical business of joining different locales together. For now one depends on the value of what the camera sees, and the way it moves in relation to what it is seeing while it is actually in process of seeing. The camera is no longer just a recorder of individual scenes and parts of scenes which have no meaning until they are pieced together.

The cameras in the new cyclorama-walled studios would photograph nothing unless something were *created* in the space enclosed by the studio walls. Scene and action in solid cinema must be designed, and not left for pattern to the mercy of cutting-room scissors. As Bower points out, the scene must play a part, and its part is as important as the play itself and its histrionic interpretation. The actors must move through the scene, their process of moving inevitably changing the scene.

Solid cinema suggests then a formal world, a world of style. But Bower says : "Despite its lack of objective realism—it can come nearer the universality in the heart of things, just on account of transmutation into such a world. The transmutation of the seemingly commonplace into a formal logic reveals a beauty and a truth yet unseen."

At last—cinema stripped to the core, which is physical freedom, absence of visual space-time continuum. Here is the space-time-free cinema-theatre. It is a meeting of the two arts. It could be a new, austere, tremendously difficult, tremendously worthwhile medium—if public opinion and film technicians are ready for it when it comes. We ought to welcome it if only for the emphasis on "what" instead of "how." Then we must hope it forms its own tradition through inspiration. But think what a film-genius like Erich von Stroheim could achieve in such a medium.

But perhaps it does look as if solid cinema might always be something in the nature of a Third Programme. It may be, therefore, that if cinema-lovers make themselves aware of what may happen, they will be able to agitate—not to suppress solid films but to have them as one type of cinema performance. Perhaps, if we make a concerted effort,



Photo : D.S. Films

Oswell Blakeston, well-known novelist, film critic and screenwriter, has been responsible for a number of screen stories. Above is a scene from "The House of Doctor Belhomme," directed by Digby Smith, 1947, from an original screenplay by Blakeston. The players pictured are **MARY STONE, BERESFORD EGAN and LILY LAPIDUS.**

we can get the "powers" to look on cinema not as a "fixed thing," but as a means for the production of many different things. If we could get authority to regard cinema as a sort of publishing house which issues many kinds of books—how rich would be our entertainment! We would have the serious solid cinema for Third-Programme moods, the cinema as we know it for thrillers like *The Dark Mirror* and *The Killers*, and perhaps even silent cinema for special custard-pie relaxations.

All this should be possible as very shortly certain research in the industry is likely to cut film-production costs to a fraction of their present inflation. However, for the moment, the exact nature of this research is an official secret.

Whatever happens, let us not be bigoted about solid cinema when it comes. There are bound to be critics who will make a tremendous outcry. Such critics always have permanent theories about something which is of its very nature transitional. Let us not be as die-hard as such critics, even if we feel it our right to assert that solid cinema is only one form of cinema.

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# Silk Purse Into Sow's Ear

by Oswald Frederick

THE NEWS that David O. Selznick is to produce a film version of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* arouses a homicidal emotion in the breast of at least one person. There is no greater enthusiast of Thomas Wolfe than myself and there is nobody more anxious to see his books brought to the notice of the British public, and (theoretically, at least) what better advertisement of a novel is there than the super-duper screening of it? But I writhe in mental and physical anguish at the thought of what they'll do to a work which I consider the finest first novel of this century.

In the United States it will be a certain box-office success. When the book was published, some eighteen years ago, it caused a sensation which no other book has equalled, with the exception of *Forever Amber*. Memories are short, perhaps, but not where scandal is concerned. *Look Homeward, Angel* lifted the lid off Wolfe's home-town so high that he dared not go home again for seven years! He had written a book so closely bound up with his own experience, with the characters so easily recognizable, that the mildest of the messages he received was the threat that he would be lynched if ever he returned to Asheville, North Carolina. Thousands bought the book for the same reason they bought *Forever Amber*: in anticipation of spicy passages, but whereas the latter is a monumental, badly-written tome which I, for one, find unreadable, the other is a work of genius which happened to catch on in a manner the author least intended. But that early publicity proved a great boon. The storm of critical applause the book received made it into a best-seller and Wolfe became financially secure and able to settle to the task of writing his later works. He became, before his sudden death in 1938, the greatest voice in American literature, and *Look Homeward, Angel*, which might ordinarily have sunk into the same obscurity which houses hundreds of other first novels, is still read and highly praised today. The film will certainly find a public between Maine and California.

In Great Britain things will be different. The book is almost unknown on this side of the Atlantic, although it was published here in 1930. But because the subject-matter was about small-town America it failed to find many readers in Britain. With the recent appearance of one of Wolfe's later books, *The Web and the Rock*, it is possible that this author will gain a belated appreciation over here. But it is eleven years since he was last published in England and he has to start from scratch again. Unless the film of *Look Homeward, Angel* is outstanding on its own merits, I can't see it breaking records in our cinemas.

Why must Hollywood continue to produce "the film of the book" regardless of whether the book is good or bad screen material? I see no other reason apart from the certainty that such-and-such a title will "pack 'em in." Excellent stories often make excellent films, of course, and *Odd Man Out* is a classic example, although one is tempted to believe that F. L. Green wrote his novel with one eye on the selling

of the screen rights. Passable films were made of books like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Random Harvest*, with unlooked-for fidelity to the originals. Not that faithfulness to the book necessarily means that the film version will be successful. Take Saroyan's *The Human Comedy*, for example. Having enjoyed the simple and intensely-moving book, I went to see the film more out of curiosity than anything else. The result was a sentimental tear-jerker which had kept closely to the novel but which was as much like Saroyan as he is like Mabel Lucy Atwill. The reason, of course, is that Saroyan simply isn't filmable.

For that matter, neither are Dostoevsky or Charles Jackson. Yet by stressing the murder of the old woman and Raskalnikov's eventual retribution, a couple of fairly entertaining versions of *Crime and Punishment* have been made, while Billy Wilder's adaptation and Ray Milland's acting made *The Lost Weekend* into one of the best pictures of its year. But neither bore a close resemblance to the works the authors produced. The continually-evolving cinema technique still forces directors and screen-writers to rely upon action and dialogue for the making of a successful movie, but it is to be hoped that some day these ingredients can be utilised to a minimum and absorbing films made without their predominance. Then, and only then may *real* screen versions of *Crime and Punishment* or *The Lost Weekend* be made.

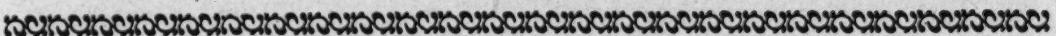
The same thing applies to the filming of the books of Thomas Wolfe. He was not a novelist in the accepted sense of that term. He had something to say and the only way he could say it successfully was through the medium of long fiction. Since his books aren't romances they have come to be referred to as novels, for a term for his unique style of writing has not yet been invented. Of course, there is a narrative of a sort in *Look Homeward, Angel*, but if Selznick remains faithful to the book, most filmgoers will get the impression that they have been seeing either the first episode of a serial—and they wouldn't be far wrong—or they will leave the cinema feeling that the last few reels had been lost and the words *The End* thrown on to the screen to prevent a riot. On the other hand, if the producer takes liberties with the book and his writers produce a script of their own they are just not filming *Look Homeward, Angel* at all.

As for casting, who on earth can play Eugene Gant, the most complex character in Twentieth Century literature? Gregory Peck is the only Hollywood actor with the Lincoln-esque grotesquerie of the later Eugene, but *Look Homeward, Angel* ends with the boy still in his 'teens. If they cast Mickey Rooney I shall wake up screaming, every hour, on the hour!

The point is that Thomas Wolfe simply is not screen material, but you can't convince Hollywood that it's impossible to film *any* best-seller. Periodically they have a shot at the biggest best-seller of all, "The Bible." Certainly the screen rights of "Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book." would have been bought up long ago if it had contained a little more dialogue; (even this epic work has more plot, however, than a number of Hollywood plots I have had to sit through recently—though that is material for another article).

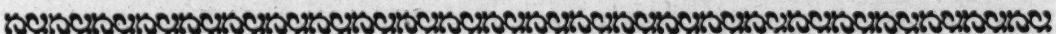
# Two Critics

## look at Jean Cocteau



### (1) Such Stuff as Dreams are Made of

by R. E. Whitehall



**A**N IMPORTANT contribution to the French cinema of the last few years has been made by Jean Cocteau, the *enfant terrible* of the 1920's, who has forsaken the patronising attitude usually adopted towards the cinema by leaders of other expressive media, bringing the whole force of his creative talents to the aid of a medium often suffering from anaemia. Writers and artists have previously limited their co-operation to the delivery of scripts, with little effect on the artistic development of the screen, or to the cul-de-sac of the experimental cinema. Cocteau's work is different.

Cocteau has experimented in many fields—poetry, novels, plays, cinema, ballet, the circus, and jazz, borrowing from one to add to the expressiveness of the other, for, according to his tenets, art must satisfy the nine muses. His first major theatrical work, *Parade*, a ballet of 1917, executed in collaboration with Picasso, Erik Satie and Massine, had transpositions of the music-hall and the early silent cinema—these were used in an attempt to create a dance reflecting a pattern of familiar life as distinct from the artificial grace of the classical dance. Inevitably his methods and reasons were misunderstood, as they have been so many times since, and the work was labelled a "studio joke," and called "erotically hysterical."

During the 'twenties Cocteau turned his attention to unrealistic mediums which he considered might be mediums for poetry—*Le Boeuf sur le Toit* with the Fratellini troupe, in 1920; a choreographic production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1924; *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* in the same year, a combination of music-hall, mime, and ballet technique, with masks by Jean Victor-Hugo, danced by the Swedish Ballet, with music by Les Six; *Orphée*, in 1926, in which the scenery became something more than a background for the actors; *Antigone* in 1927, with music by Arthur Honegger, decor by Picasso, and masks by the author; the opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* in the same year, with music by Stravinsky.

In 1930 he became one of the last of the avant-garde film-makers, when that movement had already passed its zenith. The Vicomte de Noailles and the Comte de Beaumont, who had produced Man Ray's

*Le Chateau du Dë* and Louis Bunuel's *L'âge d'Or*, sponsored Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poete*, with music by Auric and photography by Perinal. The film had many interesting ideas such as photography through glass, and was acclaimed by the surrealists, but as a film it can hardly be called important, although Michel Arnaud, the technical director, declared " Jean Cocteau has composed a poem in motion pictures," and the director went on record as saying : " I have been told by those who would congratulate me that it lacks technique. That is incorrect. There is no technique of the film, there is only the technique which each one finds for himself." The contention has been borne out in his later work for the cinema.

The end of the avant-garde movement caused most of the artists associated with its wilder phases to lose interest in the cinema (although Louis Bunuel, after making *Land Without Bread* in Spain, became the supervisor of the Spanish department for Warner Brothers in Hollywood).

During the remainder of the 'thirties Cocteau's only connection with the cinema came when one of his works, *Le Mort du Sphinx*, was adapted for the screen with Ingrid Bigum and a small English cast, although his oft-repeated desire was to re-make *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*.

Not until 1941 did Cocteau return to the cinema, when Consortium du Film persuaded him to write the dialogue for *La Baron Fantome*, directed by Serge de Poligny. The film had a beautifully sustained poetic atmosphere, with magnificent visuals, especially the dark-hued opening sequence with its lowering clouds and wind-swept landscapes emphasising the loneliness of the castle in which the action takes place, capturing a mood of expectancy and tension running through the whole film.

The next year began the association with André Paulvé, that most important French producer, which produced such beautifully conceived examples of filmcraft as *L'Eternel Retour* and *La Belle et la Bête*, demonstrating Cocteau's ability to express himself in cinematic terms as opposed to other prominent French playwrights—Marcel Pagnol, who views the film only as a succession of dialogue scenes, and André Obey, whose work on *L'Ange de la Nuit* and *La Gueux au Paradis* shows little of the imagination of *Lucrece* and *Noah*.

*L'Eternel Retour*, made in 1942, had a theme of death and immolation shocking to British critics. Many dismissed it as " neurotic " and " unhealthy " or " un-Gallic " (this last has been hurled at every French film to be shown in Britain since the liberation, with the exception of *La Cage aux Rossignols* and the conventional comedies, although the critics in question refrain from carrying the accusation to its natural conclusion by condemning such films as *Odd Man Out* as un-English).

The stylized treatment, formalised costumes, and shadowy backgrounds imparted an indefinable legendary atmosphere to what was ostensibly a modern version of the story of Tristan and Isolde. The theme was rather less one of frustrated love tortured into the ecstacies of tragedy than the battle between good and evil—Patrice, symbol of

the good and noble, pitted against his dwarf cousin, symbolising the hatred of the twisted and stunted mind for all that is beautiful, culminating in a sequence of passionate intensity with the death and transfiguration of the young lovers. The whole film mirrors the tortured strivings of man against a ruthless fate, and his haunting anguish as he at last surrenders to the inevitability of death. Certainly the philosophy of the film—that evil is in the end stronger than good, that the perfect relationship between man and woman can only come through the ennobling act of self destruction—may incalculable a kind of romantic fascism if carried to the utmost limit. But it cannot veil the realisation that here is a film wedding poetry to the cinema, freeing time and space from the ordinary rules to evoke its essential atmosphere through the mists of a dream world.

Three years later Cocteau not only adapted *La Belle et la Bête* from the story by Madame Leprince de Beaumont, but directed the film; (his influence upon the director of *L'Eternel Retour* is in any case, apparent). To capture the enchanted atmosphere of the Seventeenth Century story the director brought in a team of creative collaborators to assist him—René Clement as assistant, (Clement subsequently entered the front rank of French film directors with his documentary *Bataille du Rail*), Henri Alekan as cameraman, Georges Auric to write the music, and Christian Bérard to supervise the decor. Settings and costumes were inspired by the works of Vermeer, Le Nain, Delft, and Claude Lorraine, achieving an extraordinary richness and simplicity.

The story of Beauty and the Beast is designed to "appeal to the child in everyone," but the treatment is very far from being child-like. Cocteau's work on this film is not so much that of the director as of the choreographer—accent is placed on camera placement with each separate photograph carrying its atmosphere in the pictorial texture, an essential part of it (one of the fundamentals of the early German film and revived by Eisenstein for *Ivan the Terrible*) welded to the inherent plasticity of planned movement, escaping from a world of reproductive realism to something that more readily approached comparison with the ballet or the masque than with the usual type of motion picture.

Since the completion of *La Belle et la Bête* the poet is reported to be working on three other screen subjects: another Seventeenth Century subject, *La Princesse de Clèves*; and adaptation of *Ruy Blas*; and an adaptation of his own play, *L'Aigle à Deux Têtes*, a subject apparently inspired by the life of Ludwig II of Bavaria, which he is also to direct.

Cocteau regards his film work as cinematographic poetry, just as in all his other work the guiding force is poetry—theatre poetry, novel poetry. This imaginative interpretation may be a handicap in such a positive medium as the film. There is a danger that the fault of *Parade* may recur in his films, the fault of turning his actors into detached pieces of scenery merging into their backgrounds instead of controlling them. The elaborate atmospheric compositions of *La Belle et la Bête*, if carried too far, may destroy the whole balance of Cocteau's films as they did to those of Josef von Sternberg. On the other hand he is too great an artist to produce the artistic hokum with which Sternberg eventually compromised, and the experiments of Jean Cocteau will undoubtedly enrich the cinema as a graphic art.



### "L'ETERNEL RETOUR"

Made during the Occupation and shown in London after the cessation of European hostilities, "L'Eternel Retour" was written by Cocteau; the title was inadequately translated for British cinemas as "Love Eternal." **PIERRAL**, seen above, is the malignant dwarf who wreaks vengeance on Patrice his half-brother, and causes the death of Patrice and his sweetheart. The film was beautifully conceived, directed and acted; but its theme of death and immolation was shocking to British critics, who saw in it unhealthy indications of the Nazification of the French cinema. Nothing could be farther from the truth. "L'Eternel Retour," directed by Jean Dellanoy and tasteful piece of cinema, which, though not essentially Gallic, was as good in its own way as "La Bête Humaine" or "Le Jour Se Léve."

## (2) "La Belle et la Bête"

by Harold Lang

**I**N THE Diaghileff hey-days when advanced young artists were earnestly outraging Paris, the least predictable in that constellation was Jean Cocteau ; and in his reserved box at the ballet Diaghileff, fascinated, would often purr a challenge at him : " Jean étonne moi ! " This identical feeling about Cocteau can be detected in his most intelligent admirers, yet for once, they are not going to be astonished by his new film. That young man whom we all know, and have met at parties in Bloomsbury, Hampstead or Chelsea, mildly advanced, with a thin safe culture, and who secretly thinks he could make a terrific picture, will no doubt recollect Cocteau's film from a dozen bus-top day dreams ; probably *his* film will be " poetic " and daringly emancipated from the cinema of realism. Yet to make a " real " film, (*not* a sweat and turbine saga), a work of art with a sensation of reality, which can be popularly recognised, is an unusual director's all-too-unusual triumph.

When the beautiful *L'Eternel Retour* (widely bruted as " the Cocteau film ") was shown and damned by our critics intent on what Helen Fletcher has justly described as their " fascist witch-hunt," the faithful chose to descry Cocteau's hand behind each of the film's many felicities ; in spite of the fact that the director was the very considerable Jean Delannoy. " Wait till Cocteau himself directs," we said, " That'll be something."

Soon we were promised a film of *Beauty and the Beast*. The anticipation of this subject from " the only man for whom the myth opens its gates, and from which he returns bronzed as from a seaside holiday " betrayed us into practising phrases about film history. But, in fact, *La Belle et la Bête* is not as good a film as *L'Eternel Retour*. It is, on any grounds, an enchanting picture, but since it is by Cocteau it challenges scrutiny. Objections were raised to *L'Eternel Retour* on the grounds that its theme of " fatal love " was " Teutonic " ; but however little critics sympathised with that film's view of love, one must admit that it was clear and profound, and that almost every image in the film was germinated by that theme.

It is hard to descry in *La Belle et la Bête* the same courageous steadiness of view which made *La Machine Infernale* and *Orphée* such triumphant resurrections. The theme of ugliness transformed by love would, we thought, arouse Cocteau to inspired statements. Sadly this is not so. None of the film emerges as a serious and inevitable conclusion of the story, but rather as an unexpected sweetie.

The film throughout looks very lovely in a Sadlers-Wellsish sort of



## "LA BELLE ET LA BETE"

The second film produced for Cocteau by Andre Paulvé, this was written and directed by Jean Cocteau himself, an example of what he describes as "cinematographic poetry." The Beast is played by **JEAN MARAIS**, (the Patrice of "L'Eternel Retour"), and Beauty by **JOSETTE DAY**, (recently seen in London as Raimu's erring daughter in "The Well-Digger's Daughter"). Harold Lang does not consider "La Belle Et La Bête" as good a film as "L'Eternel Retour," though he admits that it has almost incredible visual beauty.

way. Christian Bérard has obviously enjoyed himself doing the decor, yet its seductive visual loveliness is, cinematically, its weakest point. Each frame is conscientiously composed to look like an old master, and critical air will surely be laden with the names of Watteau and Fragonard, for the highbrow hicks think this the sure sign of film art, that it should resemble some other art as much as possible. Yet the cinema is an art that exists in time, like music ; the business of the "shot" (like that of "the phrase" in literature), is to convey a series of hints which one adds into a final experience.

Undoubtedly, a director should exploit every visual means to secure his point, but laws of composition for a dynamic art like the cinema are emphatically not those of a static art like painting : one's reaction to a shot should be "how right" rather than "how beautiful." For example there is the moment of the merchant's first entry into the Beast's Palace. It is imperative we feel his fear at the unknown ; the doors swing open, silently without human agency and we see a row of candle braziers, held by human arms, which protrude from the dark walls ; at supper he is helped to wine by arms which grow from the table, and the caryatids which support the mantelpiece have moving heads (dusky boys who puff wreaths of cigarette smoke from their nostrils). Naturally one gives an impressed "Coo" at all this, yet the relevant drama is lost in a welter of wonder at this sumptuous suburban diablerie, one feels the shots are held for *our* amazement rather than to illustrate the merchant's fear. Again, there is a sequence shot in slow motion when Beauty softly glides about the palace. I love slow motion and was grateful, yet the incident was unexpected and unjustified ; it made one wish Cocteau had used the disturbing enchantment of slow motion to evoke something more specific than gasps.

Whenever there is a clear moment of drama which music could create or underline Georges Auric has worked discreet miracles, he writes fragments of sound of such essential utility that we tend to overlook them; accustomed as we are to the Turkish Baths of Warner Brothers' sound tracks.

In fairness the film abounds in excellence, yet rather as the Golden Treasury does. The fundamental disappointment is that to any student of the cinema much of this film will be—well—familiar, and this is a sad thing to have to say of one of the most original artists of the age. Cocteau claims to have made a film "for the child in all of us," which is laudable enough. But perhaps one day he will make that long-awaited film for the adult in all of us.

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## "THE BURBANK BOYS"

THE WORK of some Warners directors examined by J. W. BOOTH ●

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way. Christian Bérard has obviously enjoyed himself doing the decor, yet its seductive visual loveliness is, cinematically, its weakest point. Each frame is conscientiously composed to look like an old master, and critical air will surely be laden with the names of Watteau and Fragonard, for the highbrow hicks think this the sure sign of film art, that it should resemble some other art as much as possible. Yet the cinema is an art that exists in time, like music ; the business of the "shot" (like that of "the phrase" in literature), is to convey a series of hints which one adds into a final experience.

Undoubtedly, a director should exploit every visual means to secure his point, but laws of composition for a dynamic art like the cinema are emphatically not those of a static art like painting : one's reaction to a shot should be "how right" rather than "how beautiful." For example there is the moment of the merchant's first entry into the Beast's Palace. It is imperative we feel his fear at the unknown ; the doors swing open, silently without human agency and we see a row of candle braziers, held by human arms, which protrude from the dark walls ; at supper he is helped to wine by arms which grow from the table, and the caryatids which support the mantelpiece have moving heads (dusky boys who puff wreaths of cigarette smoke from their nostrils). Naturally one gives an impressed "Coo" at all this, yet the relevant drama is lost in a welter of wonder at this sumptuous suburban diablerie, one feels the shots are held for *our* amazement rather than to illustrate the merchant's fear. Again, there is a sequence shot in slow motion when Beauty softly glides about the palace. I love slow motion and was grateful, yet the incident was unexpected and unjustified ; it made one wish Cocteau had used the disturbing enchantment of slow motion to evoke something more specific than gasps.

Whenever there is a clear moment of drama which music could create or underline Georges Auric has worked discreet miracles, he writes fragments of sound of such essential utility that we tend to overlook them; accustomed as we are to the Turkish Baths of Warner Brothers' sound tracks.

In fairness the film abounds in excellence, yet rather as the Golden Treasury does. The fundamental disappointment is that to any student of the cinema much of this film will be—well—familiar, and this is a sad thing to have to say of one of the most original artists of the age. Cocteau claims to have made a film "for the child in all of us," which is laudable enough. But perhaps one day he will make that long-awaited film for the adult in all of us.

## "STAGE and SCREEN." SUMMER 1947

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*Photo : Warners*

Producer **ARTHUR SCHWARZ** and director **MICHAEL CURTIZ** photographed on the set of "Night and Day," the screen version of the life of the American composer Cole Porter. Some of the best-known Warners films directed by Curtiz are "Cabin in the Cotton," "Black Fury," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Casablanca" and "Mildred Pierce."

**PAUL HENREID, BETTE DAVIS, CLAUDE RAINS** and director **IRVING RAPPER**, chat between scenes of "Deception," Bette Davis's most recent film. Formerly a dialogue director at Warners, Rapper has since become one of the most promising of the "Burbank Boys" with such films to his credit as "The Adventures of Mark Twain," "Rhapsody in Blue" and "The Corn Is Green."

*Photo : Warners*



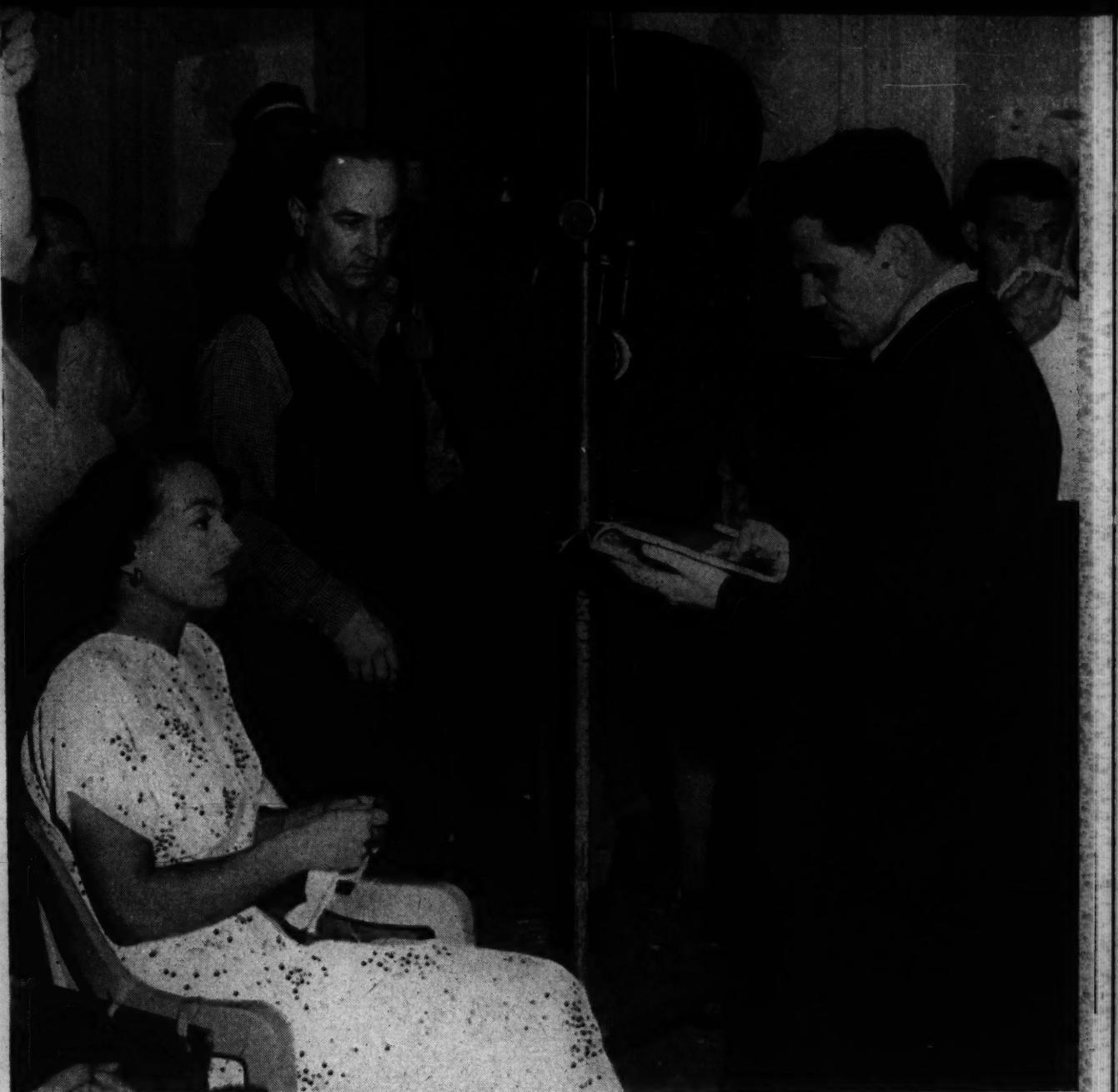


Photo : Warners

**JOAN CRAWFORD**, director **JEAN NEGULESCO** and **JOHN GARFIELD**, discussing a sequence in "Humoresque," recently seen in London. The film marked another step forward in the career of Negulesco, formerly a director of Warner shorts. He was promoted to feature films in 1943, and has since directed "The Mask of Dimitrios," "The Conspirators" and "Three Strangers." A Rumanian, Negulesco went to Hollywood as technical director for mid-European sequences in Paramount films made in the early 1930's. Now he is one of Warners' most promising directors.

this high standard he had set himself, but, again well served by both script and cast, he made *Devotion*, based on the lives of the Brontes, into intelligent entertainment, appealing at once to both cinema addict and critical filmgoer alike.

His next assignment, of great promise, is *Possessed* to star Joan Crawford, who recently appeared in an adaptation of Fanny Hurst's classic, *Humoresque*, under the direction of Jean Negulesco.

After her Academy Award for *Mildred Pierce*, Miss Crawford is today one of Warners' most valuable properties and this, her second film under new contract with them, surely marks Negulesco's most important task so far. Indeed, apart from *The Mask of Dimitrios* in 1944, the record of this former caricaturist is to date hardly inspiring.

Here the pre-war enthusiast, if finding the name of Jean Negulesco vaguely familiar, may recall that for a number of years he has been a director of "shorts" for Warner Bros. The best of these, mainly musicals, were always noticeable for their camerawork and editing. Perhaps the most notable of his short features was the Technicolour *Gay Parisian* danced by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. This daring venture of bringing first class ballet among the ranks of the "program fillups," whilst perhaps missing a great opportunity of endowing it with true cinematic life, yet had moments of real beauty of movement, music and mime."

In the field of feature production, apart from a very modest effort, *Singapore Woman*, his first important venture was with *The Mask of Dimitrios*. This adaptation of Eric Ambler's unusual novel, though overloaded with dialogue and having the tendency towards obscurity of plot shared by many of its type, yet was made into good entertainment by the imaginative quality of Negulesco's direction and his handling of the excellent character players.

A typical Hollywoodian attempt to repeat the formula with *The Conspirators* (again with Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre) was only partially successful, mainly because of the slowness of its story development, but also because Hedy Lamarr and Paul Henreid were two such unconvincing "adventurers."

Since then, *Three Strangers* (yet again with Greenstreet and Lorre), and *Nobody Lives Forever*, with John Garfield and Geraldine Fitzgerald, have done nothing to raise Negulesco to the eminence which he might now well achieve with *Humoresque*.

Joining Warner Bros. from RKO-Radio, Peter Godfrey perhaps has attained a higher average standard of success with his films than has Jean Negulesco, but he too is none the less relying on his next assignments to earn top-ranking status as a director at the Burbank studios.

These assignments should certainly provide him with ample opportunities—first comes an adaptation of Margaret Kennedy's famous romance, *Escape Me Never*, to co-star Errol Flynn and Ida Lupino, and after that he is scheduled to film Wilkie Collins' classic mystery story, *Woman in White*.

Godfrey's short career with Warners recently reached its highest level to date with his resourceful direction of *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*. Again Humphrey Bogart gave one of his excellent performances and, well supported by Barbara Stanwyck and Alexis Smith, the whole

production added up to a first-rate melodramatic thriller.

Prior to this, and after an inconsequential Warner début with the Jack Carson—Jane Wyman farce, *Make Your Own Bed*, Godfrey had been kept steadily busy directing *Hotel Berlin*, *Indiscretion* and *One More Tomorrow*. The former, adapted from the novel by Vicki Baum, may not have been a very convincing study of the last days of the Nazi regime, but nevertheless made exciting melodrama and Godfrey should be commended for his handling of the vast array of characters and story threads.

In a much different vein, *Indiscretion* was a domestic comedy trifle with some good dialogue, to which his direction and the usual polished playing of Barbara Stanwyck added the necessary sense of timing, making it gay, light-hearted entertainment.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said of *One More Tomorrow*, which followed. Here the weakness was in a story treatment which, in failing to be wholeheartedly either a mere sophisticated comedy or else a social tract directed against the upper classes of Society, fell hesitantly between its two self-imposed stools, and in so doing also fell somewhat flat as entertainment.

Such then in brief are the present achievements and immediate future possibilities of this trio—Curtis Bernhardt, Jean Negulesco and Peter Godfrey. Add to these the names of John Huston, Irving Rapper and Vincent Sherman and you have a truly formidable sextet.

Their names may not, as yet, have the same fascination, nor mean so much, as those of the favourites of "the good, old days," but these are six of the "Burbank boys" of today, for whom tomorrow surely is full of high hopes and great expectations.

Below is a scene from Warners' "The Maltese Falcon," with PETER LORRE and HUMPHREY BOGART. The director was John Huston, son of veteran actor Walter Huston. After writing the screenplays of such films as "Juarez" and "High Sierra," Huston was promoted to direction by Warners in 1941. In addition to the famous "Maltese Falcon," he was responsible for that fine film "In This Our Life," and "Across the Pacific." His most recent is "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre," adapted from the novel by Bruno Traven.



# FIVE MILES OF FILM

## in the Sudan

by Peter Graham Scott

THE telephone rang at midnight on Friday. It was the Production Manager to say that our B.O.A.C. passages had been put forward a few days and would I be ready to go on Monday morning? And so, early on a grey Monday morning in the first week in November, the four of us assembled in a wooden hut at Heathrow Airport.

We were going out to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to film No. 8 of the new J. Arthur Rank series, *This Modern Age*, the pungent monthly documentaries on world affairs which have already achieved almost as wide a following as the more senior *March of Time*. The unit consisted of the Hon. Peter Rodd, ex-Welsh Guards colonel, who had done great work in Abyssinia, Italy, and France in the war, as script-writer, (and guide and interpreter as well, for he spoke good Arabic and knew Africa intimately) ; " Ted " Moore, ex-R.A.F. pilot, who used to film low-level daylight raids over France, as chief cameraman ; Ian Grant, ex-Commando, who had landed on D-Day, and who had also filmed the Walcheren landings and Rhine crossing, as second cameraman ; and myself, also ex-Army, as director, making an all ex-service unit.

Our assignment was fairly simple. The Sudan is run jointly by Britain and Egypt, and the Government's idea is to train the Sudanese to run their own country and then hand it over to them as soon as possible. Recently the Egyptians have been claiming that the Sudan rightfully belongs to them, but few Sudanese are keen on being ruled from Cairo. The Egyptians had the Sudan from 1821 to 1884, but their rulers were so dishonest, encouraging slave-trafficking and so on, that the Sudanese revolted under their leader the Mahdi, and General Gordon, military advisor to the Egyptians was murdered. (This revolt was the basis of the story of Alexander Korda's *The Four Feathers*). Since 1898, Britain and Egypt have run the country together, although most of the officials are British.

Our job was to bring back a film showing what the country was like, and how soon the Sudanese would be able to govern themselves.

Twenty hours flying took us from London's murk to the warm morning sun of Cairo, where we had a fortnight's wait before flying the odd 1,000 miles to Khartoum, Sudan's capital. While in Egypt we shot native villages and markets, (on one occasion we nearly had the camera wrecked by crowds of baksheesh boys who wanted to be in the film and wouldn't take " No " for an answer)—town life in Cairo, and the Suez Canal. On the trip to Suez the hired car broke down in the desert, and we had to thumb a lift back to Cairo with all our cameras,



*Photo : "This Modern Age"*

**PETER GRAHAM SCOTT** (wearing sun-glasses), seen above supervising the shooting of sequences for his film "Sudan," one of the "This Modern Age" Series, (J. Arthur Rank's reply to "The March of Time"). Born in 1923, Scott is the youngest film editor in British films. He joined Strand as a cutter in 1941 and on being invalided out of the Army in 1944 became editor for Greenpark. Among the films he edited for this company are Ken Annakin's "It Began On The Clyde," and Ralph Keene's "Cyprus is an Island." "Sudan" is the first film Scott has directed ; recently he finished work as film editor on "Brighton Rock," directed by John Boulting.

tripods and so on. A second, even older car was produced by the hire-merchant, and this lasted us all day for about 200 miles, and only broke down as night fell about 40 miles from Cairo. Luckily a British truck picked us up and took us to the hotel.

We flew to Khartoum by flying-boat, and spent a fortnight there, filming schools and hospitals in Khartoum and Omdurman. The Sudan Government has gone a long way with education, and all the boys and girls looked very happy. They have even opened the first native university in Africa, the Gordon College in Khartoum. They had to break down terrific opposition against educating girls at all, for in a Moslem country girls are normally shielded from all outside contacts, and most women still wear heavy veils when they are out.

In the hospitals we photographed Sudanese doctors performing difficult operations unaided, and very trim looking Sudanese nurses, who have only recently been trained.

It is difficult to realise the hugeness of the Sudan. Imagine a country the size of Britain, France and Germany, mainly desert or scrub, with the broad White and Blue Niles, starting in Uganda and Abyssinia, meeting at Khartoum to flow 700 miles more to the Egyptian border in the North.

Getting about such a vast country might well have been a problem, but we were lent a truck by the Government, and we managed to hire a railway saloon, complete with cook and valet, to take us round the whole of the Eastern Sudan, and be parked in sidings at any town where we wished to film. Gedaref, 350 miles from Khartoum, was the first place visited in this way, and here we photographed a great agricultural scheme, which employs the first tractors and mechanical implements seen in the Sudan.

Then we went to Kassala, on the Eritrean border, and drove about 100 miles over a rocky road to film the Camel Corps patrolling the mountains. We also visited a tribe of rather fierce-looking "Fuzzy-Wuzzies," who were very pleased to act for us, although none of them knew what a film was like.

Christmas found us in Port Sudan, about 900 miles by rail from Khartoum. With the temperature at a hundred in the shade, we went swimming three times a day. We made a trip out into the Red Sea on a tug, and also photographed ships coming into the harbour at dawn.

From here we visited Suakin, an old Arab port now deserted because of the growth of Port Sudan. Wandering through the empty once-bustling streets, past crumbling Arab houses with their elegantly carved doorways, I had a tremendous sense of the impermanence of all the products of man's labour.

We returned to Khartoum by the northern route, pausing at Atbara, 300 miles away, to film the railway works, at Berber for the ruins of the old slave-market, and at Meroe for some Pyramids and a Sun Temple left by the Pharoahs. We arrived in Khartoum just in time for a New Year's Eve party.

Next we arranged with the R.A.F. to fly Ted Moore down to Malakal and Juba, in the extreme South of the Sudan. The Dinka and Shilluk

tribes in this part are still primitive and still raid one another's cattle. He managed to get some excellent sequences of tribal dances, village life, tribal courts and local dispensaries.

Together again, we set off by train (no saloon this time unfortunately!) to El Obeid, 400 miles to the West, in the Southern Sahara, which is the centre for the production of gum-arabic, a wild tree-resin used in inks, dyes and gums, of which Sudan is the main world source. After covering the gum process, we drove 100 miles to Dilling, in the Nuba Mountains, where the pagan Nuba tribes live. The local District Commissioner drove us up to one of the mountain villages, and arranged for us to film them wrestling and dancing the next day.

We were the first unit to film the Nubas, who normally wander around completely naked, although they had seen still cameramen before. On the day of the dance they all turned out in wonderful costumes with elaborately painted patterns all over their bodies. (Some of the girls even wore print frocks, and wondered why we weren't so keen on filming them as their less civilised sisters!)

We returned to El Obeid, and almost missed the weekly train because our driver overslept and failed to transport us and luggage to the station. After a day's travelling we arrived in Sennar, where a great dam spans the Blue Nile, and provides water for a Government-controlled irrigation scheme which makes something like 4,000 square miles of desert fertile. In this "Gezira" Scheme (as it is called) they grow quantities of cotton for world markets, which provides the finance for education and health services throughout the Sudan. The Sudanese farmers are given free use of 10-acre plots, and can grow all the food they need for their families and animals, besides getting 40% of the profits from their cotton for their labour.

We filmed all aspects of the Gezira scheme and returned to Khartoum. Here we interviewed and filmed the leaders of the two main political parties, the Ashigga (Brotherhood) Party, who want union with Egypt, and the Umma (People's) Party, who want independence, and think they have the best chance of getting it from the British.

Sir Sayed Abdel Rahman El Mahdi, (son of the old rebel Mahdi) who supports the Umma Party and leads an important Moslem sect, gave us a most magnificent tea when we finished "shooting" him in his garden.

Lastly we filmed the Governor-General, Lieut.-General Sir Hubert Huddleston, before returning to England after three months in the sun.

We had travelled over 10,000 miles and had used over five miles of film. Throughout the Sudan we had received a great welcome and much help from both British and Sudanese officials. The results of our trip were seen on British screens in April of this year.

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# MUST WE HAVE THE COMMENTATOR ?

*James Garland* writes about his "Bête Noir for 1947"

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**W**HAT is the average lifetime of bêtes noirs in the cinema? The particular bêtes I refer to are those formulae which start off as directors' new toys, refuse to die a natural death, and end up by haunting the film critic every time he enters a cinema. They are pretty thick-skinned brutes as a rule. Impervious to the howls of the critics they continue to flourish until they have become so familiar that nobody takes any notice of them any more. Then they quietly fade away, and nobody can be bothered even to raise a cheer.

The celestial choir was one particularly persistent specimen. For years it sang the accompaniment to the fade-out in which two celestial spirits wandered hand in celestial hand away into the sunset of the Hereafter, and not until last year did it begin to sing its own requiem and allow the dear celluloid departed to rest in peace.

As one bête sneaks out with its tail between its legs, however, another one sneaks in, and 1946 saw a new toy coming to life, making itself too much at home on the cinema screen, and settling down with every apparent intention of overstaying its welcome. The critics have not yet begun to howl, but as we advance into 1947 I for one have my mouth open ready.

"The commentator's place is in the documentary film." That sounds reasonable enough, but one might just as well say that the woman's place is in the home. Both statements *were* true, once. In more recent times, by a process of shock tactics and infiltration, women have taken over men's jobs, and in just the same way in the cinema the commentator is bidding fair to take over the work of film actor, script writer, and producer. The desirability or otherwise of the former is still a moot point. As regards the latter, for those who take their films seriously there can be no two ways of thinking.

In any normal film the use of a commentator or narrator amounts almost to an admission of failure in the first place. It is an easy way out of translating a story into terms of cinema, and tends to reduce the screen to the level of an elaborate magic lantern for purposes of illustration only. That is the worst that can be said of it, but at best it was never more than an effective trick which has been successful by reason of its novelty, but which becomes increasingly irritating as it becomes more common.

It was artistic snobbery which first gave the commentator his Big Chance in feature pictures. In screen adaptations of well-known novels he was brought in to create a literary atmosphere by reading extracts from the originals, and thereafter he quickly came to be accepted as a standard method of paying tribute to some literary giant by dragging in as much as possible of the original text. The assumption was that "So-and-So wrote it so it must be good." Admittedly it may be

good, but we go to the cinema to see a film, not to have read to us extracts from novels which we could quite well read at home.

One of the earliest examples of this practice, although it may not have been the first, was in *Wuthering Heights*, in which Flora Robson played a dual role as the housekeeper on the screen and narrator off it. In that film the commentary was not very obtrusive, being restricted to the introduction and conclusion, but what there was of it served only to destroy the illusion of reality by reminding the audience that the whole thing was, after all, only just a tale.

With the screen version of Somerset Maugham's *Moon and Sixpence* the commentator began to run amok and to take on the most disconcerting qualities. Herbert Marshall played a ventriloquist. At least, that is the only explanation I can think of for the fact that he was able to take the part of Somerset Maugham in the film and give a running commentary at the same time. His disembodied voice, reading the narrative written by the author whom he portrayed on the screen, supplied almost *all* the continuity, and many of the sequences were no more than mimed accompaniment to the reading. It was excellent entertainment, of course, and we had George Sanders to deliver Maugham's cynical epigrams, so nobody grumbled. It is a pity, however, that the novel was not re-created as a film outstanding in its own right, instead of merely being cinematically illustrated. The same might be said of *The Razor's Edge* in which Maugham (again in the person of Herbert Marshall) vocally intruded at least once in each reel.

By 1946 the commentator had really established himself, and when the British film industry suddenly decided to go places, he came along too, as a passenger. In one form or another he got mixed up with the sound track of almost every film. Sometimes he was a disembodied voice belonging to one or another of the characters on the screen; sometimes he took the place of the cinema-pest who has seen the film before and insists on telling his neighbour all about it. Either way he was a nuisance.

Worse even than bringing a story to the screen without turning it into a film is turning a story into an extremely good film and then still retaining a completely redundant commentator. Among the faults of that very excellent film *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, for instance, this was the one that went furthest to ruin it. With the plot building up in all its horror before our eyes we were compelled to give half our attention to Sir Cedric Hardwicke's cultured, dispassionate voice explaining it all in words of one syllable, for the benefit, presumably, of an audience that was either blind or half-witted. Thus, at the climax of the film, we saw Dorian suddenly leap up and plunge a knife into the heart of the portrait. "Dorian suddenly leaps up and plunges the knife into the heart of the portrait," the voice explained to us in case we had missed any of it, "and then a peculiar thing happens . . ." Apparently we were not expected to see anything peculiar about the fact that Dorian clutched at his own breast and fell to the floor mortally wounded.

*Portrait of Dorian Gray* was an extreme instance of a commentator being used to drag in as much as possible of an original text, but the

stage was reached where not even the excuse of an eminent author was required, and for one or another of the characters in a film to butt in with snatches of narrative became the regular custom. *The Seventh Veil* and *The Rake's Progress*, to take only two of the outstanding British productions of 1946, treated us to sudden interjections of pure reportage the necessity for which was taken entirely for granted and for which, in any case, there was no necessity at all.

In the documentary and semi-documentary productions with which British films first won pre-eminence the commentator did sterling service, but that is no reason why he should be accepted as a standard piece of equipment in the making of all kinds of films.

As a dragger-in of original texts in the screen-adaptations of famous novels he represents literary pretensions which do nothing to increase the prestige of the screen as an artistic medium. It is the business of a film to be cinematic, not to make pretence of putting itself between the covers of a book.

As an interpreter . . . well, a joke that has to be explained falls flat. *Must we have a commentator to explain our films?*

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Fabulous Mason

JAMES MASON—an authorised biography, by JNO. P. MONAGHAN (World Film Publications, 2/-).

**I**N THE British cinema one male star dominates the scene. He is ex-architect James Mason, voted solidly for two years running by both cinema-goers and exhibitors as Britain's leading box-office personality, a position of eminence reached by Mason after ten years of good, solid work in British film studios. His has not been a spectacular rise to fame; rather has it been his consistently excellent work over a number of years in films both first-rate and mediocre. With such recent examples of his cinematic versatility as the wounded gunman in the exquisite *Odd Man Out*, the crippled Nicholas in *The Seventh Veil*, the rascally ne'er-do-well in *They Were Sisters*, his bluff highwayman in that screen penny dreadful *The Wicked Lady*, and his elderly Yorkshireman in that delicate piece of film-craft *A Place of One's Own*, the thirty-six year old actor stands on a peak, (a peak more Denham than Darien!).

Mr. Monaghan, a close friend of Mason's, has written some twenty thousand painstaking words which do no more than give us a glimpse or two into the actor's scrap-book. His prose is unenterprising and the type is so small that the book is no pleasure to read. Mason deserves better treatment.

For an actor, Mason has more than usual sincerity, and enormous determination. It is the latter which has made him as many enemies as friends, and caused him to reject as many roles as he accepts. It was in fact this quality which made him become an actor in the first place. Born in Huddersfield, on a pleasant May afternoon in 1909, Mason confesses to having histrionic ambitions since the time when, in a childish treble, he yelled encouragement in the cinema to serial queen Pearl White, as she escaped interminably from the clutches of the bewhiskered villain. But, when he grew up, Mason had to graduate to the stage by means of architecture. A brilliant scholar, the boy took his B.A. and later his M.A. at Cambridge, and at the age of twenty-two began a career as an architect, designing model houses, town halls and sometimes theatres. But the desire to act in the latter rather than design them caused James to answer an advertisement in "The Stage," for a small-part player and assistant stage manager. He got the job, and for the next few months toured with a small fit-up company in a florid epic entitled *Rasputin, The Rascal Monk*. Gone were all thoughts of continuing a steady career as an architect. Uncertain though it may be, young Mason was happy enough with his new job.

He worked hard, learned a lot, and by 1933 the tall, dark, good looking young man had graduated from fit-up companies, through various repertory theatres, to a part in the West End in the play "Gallows Glorious." At that time it was generally conceded that the Old Vic was the ideal testing ground for promising actors. James, fortified by his ever-present determination, succeeded later on in joining the company at the Waterloo Road playhouse, and with such worthy fellow-actors as Charles Laughton, Flora Robson and Roger Livesey, he managed to impress himself, during the season, upon both critics and audience. In 1934 he appeared at Dublin's Gate Theatre, (where as guest star he followed a young American actor called George Orson Welles) and distinguished himself with many fine performances. He was reaching stature as an actor and the fact that he had received no academic stage training revealed itself not at all. To the eyes of Al Parker, a film director in the Gate audience, Mason appeared an ideal screen type and in 1935 he was offered, and accepted, his first film part in a modest effort called *Late Extra*, directed by Parker (now his agent).

Mason admits that although film after film seemed to follow in rapid succession during the next few years, he can remember the names of few of them. Perhaps this is just as well, for the "Quota quickies," infamous result of the Cinematograph Act of 1927, were not quoted for their taste or quality. (However James wishes to deny the rumour that he starred in so many "B" pictures that he began to get fan mail from hornets!) He didn't particularly like being in these rushed and shoddy productions, but they were at least a training ground and served a certain purpose. Nowadays Mason reacts strongly against

films which take too long to produce. As he recently remarked "I am tired of being in films which take six months to make."

It was film writer and director, Gordon Wellesley, who gave Mason his first real break in *The High Command*, and after this film the up-and-coming young man appeared in better roles in better films, such as *Fire Over England*, *The Mill On The Floss* and *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*. In 1938 he turned down several film offers to go into the country, where he collaborated with young actress and novelist Pamela Kellino on the screenplay of a movie which was to occupy an honoured niche in British films for many years. This was the unusual and praiseworthy *I Met a Murderer*, in which an intelligent script and direction were coupled with a real endeavour to put the British countryside on the screen. (Mason has since married his young co-star and collaborator ; they live in a Hertfordshire farmhouse, where she writes novels, while he occupies himself making excellent caricatures of his film friends, writing short stories, fondling their collection of cats and rejecting film roles).

In the past six years Mason has risen to an enviable position. Combining a handsome profile with more than usual histrionic ability, he has become the most sought-after star in the home industry. At random one may recall with distinct pleasure his work in *Odd Man Out*, and in the screen version of Cronin's novel *Hatter's Castle*, and his intelligent performances in *Thunder Rock*, *Secret Mission*, and that excellent little movie, *The Night Has Eyes*. But it has been his undoubtedly flare for period acting which has rocketed him to recent fame. The name "James Mason" on a cinema marquee has caused the queues to lengthen and the shillings to clink merrily at the box-office from the time when his sensual Rohan in *The Man in Grey*, his lecherous aristocrat in *Fanny By Gaslight* and his brutal but amorous highwayman in *The Wicked Lady* have made Masonic villainy pay heroic dividends. Since he first sneered at Margaret Lockwood and drew her to him in a passionate embrace, in the highly coloured film of Lady Eleanor's Smith's even more highly coloured novel, Mason has never looked back. His particular brand of likeable wickedness has endeared him to millions.

The young Yorkshireman does not fit in very well with the crowd of first-nighters, Savoy diner-outers, sycophants, and favour-curriers, or with any of the other well-known types which infest the film-world. He is intelligent and outspoken. This latter quality has made him some bad friends, but has affected his box-office appeal not at all. During a period of general Press adulation for British films, Mason has oft-times launched into print with a broadside against British products and producers. This has, understandably, not endeared him to a number of people in British studios, one technical body going so far as to try to ban his pictures !

The well-known Mason determination has shown itself in a variety of ways : his occasional outbursts on the set at what he considers to be inadequate direction, his protestations at having to mouth unrealistic dialogue ; these and other incidents of a similar sort are taken to

indicate that he has become "star-conscious." This is not so. He is completely sincere in his beliefs that our films will register an all-round improvement only when those of our leading film actors and actresses who care about these things will reject bad scripts, oppose certain technical indifferences and take a real interest in the production. "We can make the best films in the world," says Mason, "but the wartime revival will only continue in the post-war years if constructive criticism is able to get a hearing."

For some time now he has been in the enviable position of being able to reject Hollywood overtures. Recently Mason returned the script of a famous novel to the American company concerned with the comment, "As this script does not seem likely to make a good film I am declining your offer with thanks." Such actions have had the normal repercussions. "Mason is difficult and unmanageable," say his opponents, but there are many who praise him for having ideals and sincerity and for being unafraid to express his opinions as an artist.

Those who know him intimately will affirm that Mason in private life is very unlike the usual idea of a film star. He is bookish, intense, moody, (though he *can* be gay and charming). In the restful, white-washed rooms of his farmhouse are walls lined with books, record albums, drawings and etchings. Britain's favourite villain loves cats, reads a lot, draws skilfully, is a jazz fan, likes Lena Horne and Spencer Tracy. He writes well, expertly and with a pretty sense of humour. His stories and articles have appeared in many magazines, and with Pamela Kellino he has written a number of plays; recently with his wife he has been touring Europe, playing to the troops in both variety and straight plays. The Masons are a good team, artistically, intellectually and domestically. In April of this year they acted together on Broadway, and recently co-starred in the film *The Upturned Glass*.

James Mason is gifted in many different directions. He is untiring, and for the past ten years has worked without a stop. Not entirely unaffected by his success, he is conscious of the tremendously important part which a leading actor can conscientiously play in the reorientation of our film industry. At some future date Mason will produce his own films, for the success of *I Met A Murderer* convinced him that he can. (He was, in fact, associate producer of *The Upturned Glass*). When he does he will stand or fall by the screened result, but, whatever course Mason decides to take, one may be sure that the determination which caused him to desert architecture for the roving vagabondage of a Thespian's life still remains part of his purposeful, uncompromising personality.

In the Foreword to the book, Mr. Mason refers to the number of film writers who suggested writing his biography before he decided that Mr. Monaghan was the ideal choice to be the Boswell to Mason's Johnson. It is a pity, therefore, that out of the fascinating details of this actor's career his biographer has fashioned a dull book, almost an impossible thing to do considering the variety and incident of Mason's private and professional life.

PETER NOBLE.

## FILM REVIEW

# recent documentaries

● by JACK LINDSAY

THE main documentary event since I last wrote has been the appearance of the first issues in Rank's new series, *This Modern Age*. The series aims at providing a monthly review of some general subject of topical interest, and began with housing in *Homes for All*. This film was a good example of the solid reliable documentary which sets out to expound a theme without brilliance or bathos and to maintain attention without excitement. It tried to show how the difficulties of the housing situation had roots back in the Industrial Revolution, and although it could not resist a jibe at communal flats, it did its best to express support for the housing programme under way. In the second issue, *Scotland Yard*, the Crime Wave was covered, and the methods used by the police to counter it—a theme obviously allowing of more stirring treatment than the sad but urgent matter of our slums and derelict areas. A social moral was worked in by showing the part which ordinary citizens who indulge in the black market play in fostering crime. No doubt it was as well not to launch the series with too ambitious a technique and an all-out attempt for originality and punch ; but we can hope all the same that the producer will not keep the motto of Safety First too heavily on the camera and the script.

In *Home and School*, directed by Gerry Bryant for Crown Films, we get another capable but mild-mannered film, aimed at teaching parents that School and Home are only two aspects of what should be a single stream of development, the child's life. Petroleum Films Bureau, in three road-safety films, have made a brave attempt at lightness of touch. In *Puddle Muddle* they create a charming picture of a loony Mayor and Council who devise ridiculous traffic regulations ; while *The Ballad of the Battered Bicycle* tells the pathetic story of an ill-treated bike. *Playing in the Road*, however, reverts to the more heavy-going moral tone, and incidentally forgets to bring out that slum-children run their dangers, not from perverseness, but through lack of proper playgrounds.

Humour and unorthodox methods show up pleasantly again in some other films. Richard Massingham, confronted with the unpromising subject of a Typing Pool, has directed in *Pool of Contentment* a very funny set of sequences on how not to deal with typists. For use in government offices, it will certainly at least beget cheers from the typists who know only too well what it is to be mumbled at, smoked over, and generally bothered and obstructed by blithering office-dictators.

In *Turn it Out*, Ken Annakin, set the problem of expounding exports from the angle of the factory-worker, seems to have blenched at the many possible pitfalls of cliché. So he throws guile aside and gaily tackles the theme with himself as the indefatigable reporter, turning up at dockyards and workshops, chatting with workers and housewives,

and dashing on in search of his argument with a reckless unconcern for his own dignity but a keen sense of the points he wants to make—J.P.C.s and Equal Pay and the relation of a rise in consumption-goods to an expansion of exports. Though the sober old-school may shudder, Annakin has had a good idea ; and he may yet be found to have started something which will lead to a breed of crazily-intelligent and intelligent crazy documentaries.

A snippety potted biography of Bruce Woodcock in *Pathway to Fame*, produced by Michael Goodman, is perhaps also a humble pathbreaker. We see the Doncaster engine-fitter take up boxing and join a local working-class club, get his start as a lightweight and climb up to light-heavyweight championship by the age of eighteen. We see him helped by his father to develop his famous right and finally fighting his way through to the bout with Jack London. Prof. Joad and Madame Tussauds are thrown in for popular makeweight.

Excellent films of technical exposition continue to be made : an example is John Shearman's *The Single Point Fuel Injection Pump*. Or of vocational guidance : here we have Alex Shaw's *The Railwayman*, with good music by Temple Abady, where fine work sequences are chequered with a wish to make the rails romantic. In *North-East Corner*, Greenpark produces another of the Pattern-of-Britain series, in which once again a beautiful landscape film is created and the human elements of home and work are lyrically integrated rather than detached into analytic argument. Why complain of the lack of social criticism, as some have done ? This is perhaps the dream of human harmony with nature, but a good and necessary and lovely dream.



## A Voice from the Past

by DONALD SUTHERLAND

(journalist and playwright, formerly film critic of "Glasgow Herald")

CINEMA AUDIENCES of today do not appreciate their own good fortune. Because the change has been gradual, they have been positively less conscious of the improvement in entertainment level. Ten years ago I ceased to be a film critic. The immediate reaction was relief beyond measure and a silly vow, inevitably broken, never to set foot in a picture house again.

For six years one had averaged five feature pictures a week. They were seen from the most comfortable seats and were accompanied by lavish hospitality. Viewing apart, there were stars to be met at lunches and cocktail parties, passes for West End theatres, Midnight Matinées, World Premieres and trips to the studios or to units on location. A life of great variety among vivid and various human beings . . . yes, but a treadmill.

In those days Hollywood dominated the screen and Hollywood seldom bothered to use more than half a dozen, well-tried plots. The big studios didn't sell stories, they sold stars. Stars of the period, as Oscar Wilde (very wrongly) observed of Sir George Alexander, didn't act . . . they behaved. Obviously acting in the stage sense must be an overstatement and film acting rather less than life size because of the cast magnifications implicit in the camera and microphone. Every star had personal mannerisms and, as they were expected to sell themselves rather than any specific characterization, it became incredibly tedious to watch them repeating themselves all over again in one or other of the six approved plots no matter what the variety of the period or setting might be. And the scriptwriters couldn't cure themselves of phrases like "Won't you . . . sit down?" or "Everything's gonna be quite all right." And you knew in advance exactly how each and every player would utter them.

Whatever your opinion of America and the Americans, I don't think anyone can deny that they handle machines, be they tanks or cameras, superbly well. The Hollywood technique, the sets, the editing, the sound and photography and make up, was fifty years in advance of our own. But they were afraid of ideas, feared them as the Devil hates holy water and yet tried to cover up their fear by yelling loudly that new ideas were wanted. Glamour, stars and slickness was the formula.

An arrogant American industry, almost but not quite, a monopoly, treated British films with the same contempt that they accorded to the legislation designed to protect our native producers. They were firmly dug in on the distributing and producing flanks of the industry. All the Quota Act produced was the "Quota Quickie" hurriedly screened when the theatre was empty, or, even worse, thrown in with a good Hollywood film in order that audiences should make odious comparisons. Now and again a Hitchcock or a Victor Saville gave us a chance to sit up and cheer, but as a rule British production tried to ape Hollywood rather than strike out a line for itself.

Besides, most of the films made in Britain were not made by the British. I can remember an Elstree production in which a Russian director spoke bad French to his Czech cameraman because neither of them knew English. There also, Leon Quartermaine whose articulation has always been exquisite, was told "Meester Kvartermann . . . you sbeak nod goot die Englisch!"

No one who has not lived in both eras, and a decade of cinema is as a centicycle (if there is such a thing) of Cathay, can appreciate the changes which have taken place. The nickelodeon mentality which still dominates Hollywood, has been swept from the British scene. Young men like David Lean, Ronald Neame, Anthony Havelock Allan, Carol Reed and Thorold Dickinson have raised the level of production both in technique and in story values to the point where Hollywood is worried about the drop in British revenues. And this at a time when our studios are suffering from worn-out material which they cannot replace, and a thousand and one Government imposed restrictions unknown to their American competitors. The achievement is astonishing.

British films have discarded the six successful plots and are afraid neither of telling a story or of handling an idea. Also, and it was high time, fetish of internationalism has been overthrown. Stories used to be considered from the standpoint of some never attainable "world market." And, moreover, at a time when they had the example of the French cinema under their noses. The magical charm of films like *La Kermesse Heroique* or *La Femme du Boulanger* lay in their quintessential Frenchness. Most human beings like to laugh at the foibles of other nationals, a fact which the brains behind *The Way Ahead*, *Colonel Blimp*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *Great Expectations* and *School For Secrets* have not forgotten.

There has never been any question as to the capacity of British players Hollywood's anxiety to sign them up as soon as they have made a hit in British films has become almost ludicrous. But I am not at all sure that players like John Mills, James Mason, Michael Redgrave, Trevor Howard, Michael Wilding, Rosamund John, Celia Johnson, Joan Greenwood . . . to mention a few names haphazard as they come to mind, are not founding a school of acting as idiomatic and, in its own genre, no less accomplished than the French ; stars who can act.

The necessity of publicizing Britain's war effort has helped the swing towards nationalization, so too, did Errol Flynn's one man conquest of Burma, by underlining a situation which had become grotesque. But to a ghost from the past like myself, what matters most is the fact, confirmed by the manager of my local cinema, that new British films are eagerly anticipated by his clients whereas they used to be feared.

Doubtless, in the eyes of Hollywood, our offence is Rank, but in competition with a billion dollar industry we had to find a magnate of his financial standing. There is still plenty of screen time in British cinemas for the best films from any nation in the world . . . and they are welcome, but there is no reason today why we should suffer mile upon mile of mindless rubbish, tripe and offal as we used to do. Ideas are coming in and ideas will stay.

In conclusion, one thing is missing . . . and perhaps Mr. Rank could supply it. In London we have two cinemas devoted to the French film, one to the Russian and two more to Continental films, but there is no cinema confining itself to an all-British programme. We make many excellent documentaries and a programme in which a feature and three shorts alternated weekly with two features, one new, one old, would surely be welcomed.

**ERRATA :** In the last "FILM QUARTERLY" publication we inadvertently gave the title of Erich von Stroheim's new film, soon to be seen in England, as *Gambling Ship*. The title is in actuality, *Gambling Hell*. We offer our apologies to Renown Pictures, who, we understand, have obtained the exclusive United Kingdom and U.S. Rights to distribute this French film, which has been given English dialogue. We would like to add that we believe Renown Pictures are doing a great service to filmgoers in bringing the French films of Erich von Stroheim to British audiences ; we understand they are negotiating for further titles.

## FILM REVIEW

### Reflections on "ODD MAN OUT"

by Julia Symmonds

**I**N FACE of the ecstatic praise that has been lavished on this picture, dare I confess that for me the most exciting moment was when a coalman came down the street, not only driving a coal cart but actually delivering coal? Now this is not intended to be one of the facetiae which are too apt to take the place of serious constructive criticism; it is the genuine record of a genuine reaction, influenced no doubt by personal circumstances which have nothing whatever to do with the film. But the point is that having noted this effect, one searches for the explanation of its persistence in the face of the wealth of detail, character, whimsy, comedy (for there is plenty of all these ingredients; almost an *embarras de richesses*, in fact) that precedes and follows it, and should, one would have thought, obliterate it. The conclusion one reaches is that somehow, in spite of the life and bustle of the crowded canvas—perhaps because of it—one does not really care what happens to the hunted man, and there is no sense of urgency. The pace is even, temperate—adjusted no doubt to Irish life as thought of by literary gents, but unsuited to engendering a feeling of doom. The fact that you know from the start what the end will be cannot of itself produce this sense of fate; and neither does it necessarily mean that suspense, that essential of drama, is eliminated. We know what is going to happen to Oedipus and Agamemnon and Hamlet and Macbeth; but we are urgently concerned with their stories, nevertheless. In these cases the doom and the mounting suspense elements are fused into a grand compound of tragedy; and in that word "mounting" lies one of the clues to the weakness of *Odd Man Out*. It does not mount; it walks—into houses, into pubs, on to trams, into studios (such as never were on land or sea) into haunts of jitterbugging, into churches, into brothels; and by the end of the journey, the traveller, all but surfeited with sight-seeing, feels that although he has kept his goal in mind all the way, by this time it doesn't really much matter whether he reaches it or not.

This may be all very well for literature; it is no good for drama, and particularly for drama of such a type as *Odd Man Out*. The theme, and indeed the scheme, of the film are not new; the pattern is almost exactly the same as in Galsworthy's *Escape*; but the effect is totally different; and this is partly due to the fact that in *Escape*, as in *I am a Fugitive from a Chain-Gang*, the central character is the dominant, the chief protagonist; whereas in *Odd Man Out* he is a mere cipher, simply a peg on which to hang the various garments that go to dress the film. This is not altogether James Mason's fault, for *Odd Man Out* is in the main a director's picture; and one has the feeling that the director's material has somehow run away from him, that in trying to fill



*Photo ; Two Cities*

### **"ODD MAN OUT"**

**JAMES MASON** as Johnny McQueen and **KATHLEEN RYAN** as his tragic sweetheart in Carol Reed's magnificent film from the novel by F. L. Green. Julia Symmonds in the accompanying article, has some criticisms to offer, but on the whole, she agrees that "Odd Man Out" may be spoken of in the same breath as such classics as "I Am A Fugitive" and "Le Jour Se Léve." Carol Reed is now working on a new film for Sir Alexander Korda, while Mason's newest film "The Upturned Glass," on which he is also associate producer, will be seen in London shortly.

his canvas with lively detail he has obscured the central subject ; but a more forceful type of personality in the role of the hunted man would have broken through this dimming web, and in doing so held the picture more strongly in focus. Mr. Mason, in spite of sphinx-like silences, Siamese cats, and acid letters to the Press, has never really convinced me as a tough guy. There is a certain, shall we call it gentleness, in his personality that makes it quite impossible to believe in his Men in Grey who neglect their wives and beat their mistresses to death, his sadistic guardians who cudgel their piano-playing wards over the knuckles out of thwarted affection. It takes more than a fierce scowl to convey the savage, brutal and dominating male ; and in *Odd Man Out* Mr. Mason has not even the assistance of the scowl. Here indeed the "gentle quality is not wholly out of place ; it sorts with the (presumable) idealist who would and does die for his cause while shrinking from shedding another's blood ; but it should not be the only characteristic to be noticed. A fanatic of this kind, who has broken jail and planned a desperate hold-up for the sake of his "organisation," should have at least a gleam of fire, sufficient to light up the story of his passing with rays of warmth ; but Johnny McQueen is a colourless wraith from the very beginning, and his misadventures are related as they might be in the police-court, in the cold grey light of indifference. Now this I maintain is a capital mistake. It is partly due to the actor's personality, but in a greater measure to the failure to establish sympathy at the very outset for the hunted man, and consequent interest in his fate, wounded as he is and on the run from the Ulster police. We are shown at the opening what is really neither more nor less than a group of gangsters (even though they call themselves "the Organisation") who are plotting robbery with violence in order to raise funds for some "cause" unspecified. So far, surely, the matter is not calculated to raise the audience's wild enthusiasm, except in criminal circles ; and when the enterprise ends in the murder of an unfortunate cashier, who nevertheless also succeeds in shooting the ringleader, the spectators' reaction to the latter event is apt to be "And serve him right." This may be priggish, but it is a natural tendency in a civilised audience to take sides against the criminal unless it is given very good reason—emotional and dramatic reason, that is—for doing otherwise. It is not given that reason in *Odd Man Out*.

There are vague references to the "Organisation" but what is really established is that a crime has been committed, and that a man has been shot committing it. If he has any justification it is not set out. It is not enough to talk vaguely of the "Organisation" without a hint of its aims, or even, indeed, that it has any aims other than the amassing of money, and expect people to be enthusiastic over the fate of a murderer who happens to belong to it. Here again one would point the contrast with both *Escape* and *I am a Fugitive*. In both these works the reasons for the protagonist's actions, chivalry, injustice, ill-treatment, are so strongly emphasised that sympathy and interest are not established and maintained, but increased right to the climax ; but if Johnny McQueen has suffered injustice we are shown nothing of it. Loyalty to an ideal is a very good reason for admiration and sympathy ; but we must see something of the ideal before we can

accept murder and robbery as legitimate acts by a hero. That is the point ; all through the film, Johnny McQueen is not treated as a criminal, but as a hero ; yet only his crime is explicit, his heroism merely implicit.

The producers have in some measure sought to counter both these criticisms by a preamble which says they are not concerned with the struggle between illegal organisations and the police, but with the conflict in the hearts of ordinary people who find themselves involved. This ground, indeed, is explored fully and excitingly ; and had one really felt burning sympathy for the fugitive, and at the same time known the sensation that

" Always at my back I hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near,"

this would not have been a good film, but a great film.

For it is a good film ; that is what makes one so regretful that it is not just that little bit better. The photography is not only picturesque, but imaginative, used skilfully to express the opening fairness of what the Victorian novelists would have called "the fatal day," the garish brightness of the pub, the illusive quality of the warder seen in Johnny's hallucination (for one moment, while not realising he was a figment of delirium, I yet thought "I wonder if he's meant to be a ghost") the slimy darkness of the slum streets, the pantomime quality of the artist's studio, the snowy silence of the square where Johnny and Kathleen at last find peace together. It is not poetic, as *Day of Wrath* or *Amok* or *Le Jour se Lève* are poetic, though there is one shot of two old women at a window looking down on the commotion with old, beautiful, incurious faces, that might have come out of the first-named.

The various incidents are depicted with the cool, unemotional detachment which, though evidently the director's intention, is for me a serious dramatic fault. The symbolism of the last day of Johnny's life opening in sunshine, developing in storm and ending amid the cold silence of snow is simple, but effective ; the different people he encounters in his attempted journey from the air-raid shelter where he has taken refuge to the ship which will, he hopes, smuggle him to safety, are shown with vivacity, and, save in one instance, truth—the suburban English housewife (Fay Compton in a careful and sympathetic study) whose kind heart leads her into the, to her, horrifying predicament of assisting an escaping gunman ; the publican whose one thought is to protect his own skin and purse—a truthful and clear-cut character-sketch, this, from William Hartnell ; the cabby who wishes no harm to the wounded man, but gets rid of him all the same like a sack of garbage in a rubbish-dump ; the gang of ragamuffins re-enacting in macabre mimicry the crime and downfall of the dying man ; the elderly trollop who, to keep on good terms with the police, betrays Johnny's associates to their death ; and, pervading, all the cheerful uncaring bustle of the daily life of the Irish town, and the recurring motif of the struggle of Johnny's sweetheart to reach him before it is too late.

It is only when the director has apparently said to himself "Here, we must introduce a little more Irish fantasy into this—a few leprechauns and fairy rings to bring it home to people that this really is Ireland" that the film falls into insincerity—the manufactured situa-

tion and stock character which blur it artistically. The fringe of this would begin with Father Tom, the typical "Father O'Flynn" of musical and literary legend, were it not for the warm humanity of W. G. Fay's acting. Even here one suspects the leprechaun is just about to peep out, but it is no more than a suspicion, and not an unpleasant one. The fantasy is carried much farther in the extraordinary figure of Shell, who bargains for Johnny's safety with his friends. It is all F. J. McCormick can do to make this cunning simpleton, by Whimsey out of Moonshine, credible at all; but how the character would have been strengthened had it been nauseating instead of comic! Fantasy is, however, pushed to its extreme limit and over into Cloud-cuckooland in the episode of the crazy artist who wants to paint the dying man. This whole incident is false—it reeks not of the theatre so much as the circus and the scenic designer. The character is mere pasteboard and the setting in keeping. This crumbling tenement, with its dilapidated stairs and still more dilapidated occupants, is like nothing so much as a scene in one of the tawdrier opera companies' rehearsal of "*La Bohème*." At any moment one expects Lukey to burst into a serenade to his old coat, probably to be answered by Shell from the floor above in Papageno's "I'm a Jolly Bird-catcher." The inherent absurdity of the idea that a painter, even of the realistic school, which Lukey does not appear to be on the evidence of his work, would insist on propping a dying man up on the model's throne to paint his death-agonies, even if he had so little inspiration that he needed to do so, might have been made acceptable by the actor's presentation; but Robert Newton's ranting, raving maniac, this time by Grotesque out of Delirium Tremens, simply takes the easy way out by yielding to the rank fustian of the whole and magnifying instead of trying to rectify the fault. It out-Herods Herod and Out-Pistols Pistol.

But this lapse of artistic judgment does throw into stronger relief the sincerity of the rest of the acting and direction. It is in the figures of the two women most closely concerned with Johnny that the film for a moment touches comedy and tragedy and poetry. Only from Kathleen (Kathleen Ryan) do we get the feeling that somebody really cares what happens to Johnny McQueen—cares enough to die with him. The part could easily have been trite, but Kathleen Ryan's performance has that indefinable thing that lifts acting into life itself. I hope that her dark full-faced Madonna-like beauty will be left alone by the groomers and glamourisers and planners of the standard screen face. Perhaps the most purely poetic performance, tiny though it is, comes from Kitty Kirwan as Granny, with her beautiful humorous old face and soft lilting voice telling of the grand days of her youth; but all these fine Irish actors' playing has the root of the matter in it, from Maureen Delany's trollop, Cyril Cusack's weakling braggart, and Dan O'Herlihy's handsome lout to the sympathetic, not to say fascinating, Inspector of Denis O'Dea.

Take it all round, this film, in most of its component parts so fine, ought to add up to more than it does; but though it is not another *I am a Fugitive* or *Le Jour se Léve*, the very fact that a British film can now be deservedly spoken of in the same breath with the latter is a tribute more telling than unqualified praise.

# A NOTE ON CZECH FILMS

## by HERBERT LOM

(Mr. Lom is the well-known Czech actor who scored a success as the psychiatrist in "The Seventh Veil". His recent films include "Dual Alibi" and "Good Time Girl")

THE Czechoslovakian Film Festival recently held in London has created considerable interest in Czech films. Last year a Festival of British films was held in Prague. "We were overwhelmed," wrote Anthony Asquith, "by the vitality of the new Czechoslovakian film industry and by the keen desire of those engaged in it for friendship and cultural exchange with Great Britain. How could all that we had learnt be conveyed to the people at home? Out of this question was born the idea of a Czech Film Festival in Britain, to give the British people some opportunity of judging for themselves the achievements of the Czechoslovakian industry since the Liberation."

Czech films before the war were as little known as was Czechoslovakia itself, which to many here was "The far-away country of which we know nothing," (to quote the late Mr. Chamberlain). And yet the Czech film went through the same phases of development and suffered from the same growing pains as the film in Britain or other countries. In Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere, the film was long regarded merely as a source of popular entertainment and amusement, but for years responsible film critics, as well as representatives of art and culture and the general public, have fought with the producers for the recognition of the film as one of the most important factors in the cultural and political education of the nation. However, before the war, in spite of the skill of Czech film technicians, their cinematography did not take full advantage of its possibilities. Films were of a poor level and film-art lagged far behind their other cultural and artistic activities (music, theatre, painting). Czech films were hardly ever seen abroad. I can only remember *Extase* being shown widely in other countries, (and this due only to the interest aroused by the Hedy Lamarr nude sequences!)

One of the reasons for the shortcomings of Czech films before the war may be attributed to the fact that the industry was in the hands of a large number of privately-owned firms, whose policy was dictated mainly, and often exclusively, by commercial interests.

During the German occupation the Nazi regime, in order to create a bigger market for their own films, did their best to strangle the home production, as the following figures show:—In 1939 the Czechs produced 41 films: in 1940 they were allowed to produce 31; in 1941: 21; in 1942: eleven; in 1943: eight; in 1944: six. Czech studios were ruled by the Germans, and Czech film workers just had to wait till there was a little corner available for them to work somewhere in the studios. Great difficulties were put in their way, and it happened not once but many times that a Czech production unit had to clear out in the middle of making a film because the Germans decided to move in one of their own productions. But the Germans did one good

thing. They installed in the Barrandov Studios in Prague the finest technical and sound equipment and built several new stages, so that today, (thanks to the Fuhrer!) Barrandov is one of the best equipped studios in Europe.

The wish to free the film from the shackles of the Germans and then from the Czech financiers led to the demand for the nationalisation of the industry immediately after the Liberation. Once the Germans had gone, a decree of the President of the Republic in August, 1945, placed the film industry on a national basis. Since then the State has been the sole agency entitled to own and run film studios, to exhibit films and to manage their import and export. All profits earned are devoted by the State towards furthering the development and growth of the industry. The Czechs are now making each year about twenty feature films and a large number of children's films, educational films, and cartoon and puppet films. Many of these films cost far more to make than they can earn in the Czech cinemas, but they are subsidised out of the total income of the industry, which also maintains a Film Institute, has just started a High School for the training of film workers, and recently opened several big cinemas specially for children.

The Czech films shown in London during the Festival, varied in character and quality. Compared with pre-war production—and I can speak with some knowledge, as I worked at that time in the Czech film industry—the artistic and technical level has risen tremendously. The photography is brilliant throughout, script and continuity of a fairly good standard, though not outstanding : the acting slightly on the heavy side. As to the themes, they all dealt with the problems the Czechs have had to face since 1939 and are still facing today. Their films are historical films, political films and Resistance films. This is only too understandable if one realises that unlike us in Britain the Czechs have not been able to see any war or resistance films, (except Nazi movies), since 1939. They have now produced a few, "just to get them off their chest," as it were.

*Warriors of Faith* was a large historical tableau photographed in Agfa-colour (much better than Technicolor) and on as big a scale as any Hollywood production, but the story was episodic, continuity confusing and dialogue too long-winded even for the Czechs themselves, who crowded the New Gallery Cinema in Regent Street.

*Men With Wings* depicted the fate of the brave workers and crews of the Czech airfields during the German occupation. This real-life Resistance story made Hollywood and British "Resistance" films look like well-rehearsed amateur shows!

*The Stolen Frontier* deals with the Munich Crisis and the risings on the Czech borderlands. It was made by young director, Jiri Weiss, who worked in the Crown Film Unit in Britain during the war, and made *Before The Raid* here, among others.

*The Warning*, a Slovak production which I have not seen, is, I am told, perhaps the best film shown. It is based on a successful Slovak play and deals with the persecution of the Slovak mountain folk by the Hungarian nobility.

*The Strike* is a brilliantly acted and brilliantly produced document

of the fight for a general vote in the miners' district of Kladno (the area where the village of Lidice once stood). Marie Vasova, Czech actress of the National Theatre, Prague, and popular film star, plays the lead in this, and has an interesting part in another film entitled *The Violin and the Dream*.

Not all the above Czech films were shown in London. Some of them were shown in Oxford and Cambridge, and in Scotland ; (*The Unruly Teacher*, for example). A particular success with British audiences were the cartoon and puppet films, such as *Christmas Carol*, which have a unique and quite delightful quality.

An agreement was signed recently between the Rank Organisation and the Czech Industry, by which 40 Rank films per year will be shown in Czechoslovakia. So far nothing has been decided with regard to the showing of Czech films in Britain. At the time of writing, the Czech films have gone for exhibition to Scotland, where another Festival is being held. The films will remain in Britain, and will I hope be obtainable for showings in Film Societies and private halls. (The British Film Institute or the Czech Film Attaché in London may be contacted by Societies).

Many of those working in the Czech film industry were a little frightened when a Film Festival in London was first mentioned. They were not at all sure whether their young and somewhat inexperienced film industry had progressed sufficiently for the results to be shown abroad. But now that the films have been shown I think only good can come of it, and the bonds of understanding and friendship between the two industries and the two nations have undoubtedly been greatly strengthened.

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## “THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES”

*the Academy Award film*

reviewed by ROBERT STANNAGE

**R**EALISM on the screen rarely bears a Hollywood trademark. American film-makers are experts in the slickly synthetic, sticklers for boy-meets-girl-and-all-ends-happily, past-masters in the creation of almost-credible puppets. There have been exceptions, of course ; (pictures like *Strange Incident*, *The Southerner*, *The House on 92nd Street* and *Boomerang* had realism in plenty). Often the best Hollywood films are timidly presented by their makers, with an almost apologetic air. Normally they do not open at a first-grade West End house. They rarely get the distribution they deserve ; and they have to get by without any publicity fanfares.

It was pleasing, and a little surprising, therefore, to discover, in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a film of high quality, despite the ill-omens of a star-studded cast, a £600,000 budget, and the volume of publicity reserved for an all-time epic. In just under three hours, *The Best Years of Our Lives* comes really to grips with a present-day problem not peculiarly American—the readjustment of ex-soldiers to

civilian life. This difficult theme is approached with sincerity and respect. First praise is due to Robert E. Sherwood, for a masterly script, (from Mackinlay Kantor's verse story); to William Wyler, for his sensitive, understanding direction; and to Samuel Goldwyn for having originated and backed the idea to the Goldwynian heights.

I found the picture, in parts, a little too sentimental for my tastes—but I remembered that it is about Americans, and was made by Americans. There are times, it seems, when U.S. citizens like their film-fare not sweet, but sickly-sweet; not merely weepy, but tear-drenched. The film would, therefore, have lacked native realism if the essentially American characters had, in times of stress, acted with the notorious reticence of the English.

We are introduced to three returning ex-Servicemen, of widely-differing types—Fred Derry (Dana Andrews), a much-decorated Air Force captain who, not unnaturally, is averse to returning to soda-jerking; Homer Parrish (Harold Russell), a young sailor who has lost both his hands in an explosion; and Al Stevenson (Fredric March), oddly dissatisfied with his well-paid job in a bank. All three are men in whom you can immediately believe. Their individual re-settlement problems and emotional difficulties are shown in detail and at length.

Fredric March gives one of the most praiseworthy performances of a distinguished career as the fortyish ex-sergeant who returns to his wife (Myrna Loy), his daughter (Teresa Wright), his comfortable flat and his ordered way of life, to find them all rather strange, too conventional and smug, and not immediately acceptable. His bank gives him promotion—but he becomes increasingly unhappy about this smugness and the cold inhumanity of High Finance.

Ex-captain Dana Andrews has twin problems—an almost hopeless battle for a better job than he had before the war, and his love for Teresa Wright (while he is married to a flighty, pleasure-loving, no-good, Virginia Mayo). One of the film's only concessions to convention is the happy ending for him.

Harold Russell (not a professional actor, but the genuine article, an ex-Serviceman who lost his hands in the war) is in a tragic mental state, rejecting pity and even the love of his fiancée, wishing that everyone would treat him as a normal healthy human being. He provides most of the pathos; his pride in the way he manipulates his artificial hands is very convincing, and his case, typical of thousands, is the most arresting, its solution the most stimulating.

Despite the seriousness of its subject, the picture has many lighter moments (among them a scene in which Fredric March proves once again that he is the screen's most lovable drunk). At first sight it seems too long: and yet it is difficult to suggest parts that could have been pruned without sacrificing continuity. Intriguing is the suggestion that it is sometimes just as difficult for civilians to adjust themselves to returning warriors as it is for ex-Servicemen to settle down into normal life after years in the battle zones.

*The Best Years of Our Lives* has warmth, compassion and understanding. It is genuinely alive. It is, in fact, mature cinema for adults.



*Photo : R.K.O.-Radio*

**TERESA WRIGHT** and **DANA ANDREWS** in a scene from "The Best Years of Our Lives," the Samuel Goldwyn film, directed by William Wyler, which won the Academy Award for 1946.

**DEBORAH KERR** and **FLORA ROBSON** as two of the nuns in "Black Narcissus," written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, from the novel by Rumer Godden.

*Photo : Archers*



# Some Recent Films

reviewed by The Editor

AFTER his long exile in Hollywood, Julien Duvivier brilliantly marks his home-coming by directing one of the best French films ever seen, *Panique*, from a story by the incomparable Georges Simenon. The scene is a Parisian suburb, where a woman is found murdered and robbed on a piece of waste land. A whispering campaign is started by the real murderer, a worthless pimp, and his girl-friend, against M. Hire, a strange and much-disliked figure who lives in the local hotel. Reticent, bearded, quiet, almost surly, Monsieur Hire naturally becomes a suspect. Gradually hysteria grows in the neighbourhood, ordinary respectable shopkeepers become obsessed with lynch lust, a murmuring panic grows, and in one final, terrifying sequence the innocent man is hounded to his death from the roof-tops while the crowds hiss menacingly below.

*Panique* is a sociological study of any suburbia, though it is essentially a French picture. The characterisation is superb and Michel Simon as the tragic M. Hire has never given a better performance, (not even in Vigo's *L'Atalante*). Paul Bernard and Vivianne Romance as the scheming lovers are capital, while the portraiture and atmosphere of the neighbours, shopkeepers, hotel-loungers, police are all sketched with intimate and loving detail by Duvivier.

*Panique* bears comparison with that other masterpiece *Le Jour Se Lève* directed by Marcel Carné ; in fact, there are many similarities between these two films.

After the Hollywood disappointments of *The Great Waltz*, *Lydia* and *The Imposter*, this reveals that Julien Duvivier is still the great artist whose *Carnet de Bal* and *La Bête Humaine* rank among the memorable films of the past thirty years. For the work of M. Simon and the direction of M. Duvivier, *Panique* is worth your serious attention. (One must offer grateful thanks to Sir Alexander Korda for bringing the film over to his Rialto Cinema, and for preparing to give it a national showing in Britain).

In its own way *The Brothers*, directed by David Macdonald, from the novel by L. A. G. Strong, is almost as powerful as *Panique*. It also possesses what C. A. Lejeune describes as "savage cynicism," and is an adult, if sombre, piece of cinema which, if it had been French

or Swedish would undoubtedly have been hailed as a masterpiece. Being British, it has received moderate acclaim, but it is pleasing to note that the most responsible of the film critics are all agreed on its excellence. *The Brothers* is a grim story set in the Isle of Skye, in the year 1900. To a family, consisting of a father and his two sons, whose livelihood appears mainly to be whisky-smuggling, comes a young girl straight from an orphanage to act as their servant and housekeeper. She finds herself attracted to the younger brother, while the elder brother is driven to distraction by unrequited love for her. There are scenes as grim and grey as ever came out of a British studio : rape, torture, murder, smuggling, hate and lust, are the chief ingredients of this Scottish hot-pot.

The only lighter moments are provided by Andrew Crawford, a Scots actor with a certain charm, but the acting honours go to Finlay Currie, John Laurie and Duncan Macrae. Patricia Roc was not helped by some of her dialogue, and one could never make up one's mind as to whether she was, in fact, a trollop or a completely innocent and guileless young woman. Perhaps one was never supposed to know ? At any rate, *The Brothers* indicates that David Macdonald, director of *Men of the Lightship*, *Desert Victory* (and that amusing *This Man Is News* series a few years ago), is a British director who will soon take his place with the Carol Reeds and David Leans.

At the Curzon recently was a pre-war French film, *The Deserter*, with Jean Pierre Aumont and Corinne Luchaire, (who will be remembered for her appearance in the Korda film *Prison Without Bars* in 1938). This story of a deserter, who takes two hours off from the Army to straighten out his love affairs at home, is interesting but oppressive ; this is mainly due to the pedestrian quality of the production. M. Aumont is a sensitive actor, however, and is certainly a great deal better here than he was playing Rimsky-Korsakov in that recent piece of arrant nonsense *The Song of Scheherazade*.

That extraordinarily talented combination Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger never fail to produce films which are strikingly "different," and *Black Narcissus* is no exception. Adapted from Rumer Godden's book about a group of nuns who settle in a former House of Pleasure in the Himalayas, the film avoids all the usual clichés, and is tasteful, and beautifully acted—by Deborah Kerr, David Farrar and Kathleen Byron—with some of the most exquisite colour combinations ever seen in British films. I also liked another recent Technicolor production, *The Man Within*, produced by Sydney Box and directed by Bernard Knowles from the novel by Graham Greene. There were grim sequences in this, almost as terrifying as in *The Brothers*, and though inclined to slowness, the film had acting by Michael Redgrave and Joan Greenwood of the highest order.

Add to the above films two delightful Raimu movies, *The Well-Digger's Daughter* and *Monsieur la Souris*, and two interesting Hollywood studies in psychiatry, *The Locket*, directed by John Brahm, and *The Guilt of Janet Ames*, directed by Henry Levin, and we have skimmed the cream from the quarter's offerings.

## BOOK REVIEW

# BRITISH FILMS COME OF AGE BY OSWALD FREDERICK

THE BRITISH FILM YEARBOOK, 1947-48 edited by PETER NOBLE (British Yearbooks, 21/-).

I DO NOT intend to detract from the first edition of THE BRITISH FILM YEARBOOK when I say that the new, revised and enlarged 1947/48 edition is by far the better book. A year or so ago, when British Yearbooks published Peter Noble's comprehensive work on our national film industry, it was a book which was very badly needed. During the war years the cinema in this country had made tremendous strides, and it is no exaggeration to say that the best British films of 1940-46 were also some of the world's best. Public enthusiasm and interest in home productions reached a pitch which even the most optimistic among us had hardly anticipated, and Peter Noble, one of the most enterprising of our younger writers on the cinema, offered us a long-awaited volume on the British screen which received a warm welcome from filmgoers.

The amount of research which must have gone into its writing was prodigious, but that the labour and energy expended was not a wasted effort was indicated by the book's reception. Now comes the second edition of this useful yearbook, and the wealth of information it contains on every conceivable aspect of the motion picture industry in this country is quite staggering.

This time Mr. Noble has not taken the whole weight of the work on his own shoulders. He has gathered all the recognized authorities of each of the numerous departments of film production under his wing, with the result that over and above the lengthy reference section he has compiled and his long review of British films of the year, there are seventeen separate contributions by personalities of the film world as varied as Agate and Asquith, Dickinson and Rotha.

C. A. Lejeune has written an article warning producers of the difficult job they are faced with now that the war is over. It is a well-known fact that the war-years 1939 to 1945 aided, rather than hindered British film production, and Miss Lejeune points out that the vast new audiences engendered by the boom now anticipates more British films of the same high quality. "Can this high quality," she asks, "be maintained when the conditions that created it have vanished?" If recent pictures minus the war-theme like *Odd Man Out* and *Great Expectations* are anything to judge by, then her question has surely been answered?



*Photo : Two Cities*

**PETER NOBLE**, editor and author, chats with star **JOHN MILLS** on the set of "The October Man," produced by Eric Ambler, and directed by Roy Baker, 1947. Mills will also be seen this year in "So Well Remembered," directed by Edward Dmytryk, from the novel by James Hilton. Mr. Noble's new books include "The Art of the Cinema," "British Ballet," and "The Negro in Films."

James Agate gives the industry a boost by dealing it a knock in his customarily witty manner. We do not take him seriously when he says that he only knows one British film star by his scowl and another because he reminds him of the Achilles statue wearing a raincoat and bowler! Neither is it strictly true that there are only two stories in the films our stars are ever called upon to act ; but we see what he is getting at. Perhaps James Mason *was* in danger of becoming typed as the lovable brute, and most certainly there *was* a surfeit of thrilling but practically identical "underground movement" films. I think however that the powers-that-be checked the bad habits before they became too bad. "What's all the fuss about British films ?" asks Agate in this sane and effective reminder that good as our pictures are today, there is still much room for improvement.

Ernest Irving writes on "Music and the Film Script," Jack Lindsay tells us about the documentary films of the past year, while Paul Rotha deals lucidly with seventeen years of this particular branch of film-making. Good factual films are perhaps Britain's greatest artistic contribution to the cinema, and although documentaries have a far greater public now than they had, it must be admitted that it was the general interest in the various theatres of war which largely contributed to the success of films like *Western Approaches*, *Desert Victory* and *The Way Ahead*. Paul Rotha reminds us that the documentary method is now ready to graduate into the feature film world providing the economic basis of production is just to the creator, and that factual producers will have something spectacular to show us in the next few years.

Thorold Dickinson writes on "Making a Film in Tanganyika Territory," Anthony Asquith on "The American Invasion," and Mary Field on "Children's Entertainment Films." Our questions about the future are answered by Michael Powell in "The Shape of Films to Come" and by George Elvin in "The Way Ahead," a technical offering which is full of interesting statistics.

Baynham Honti will satisfy those readers who are primarily interested in technical equipment used in the British studios during 1946, and Ralph Bond writes on "British Films in Prague," dealing with those productions which were shown at the Czecho-Slovakian Festival of British Films in October. (*Journey Together* and *The Captive Heart*, were, it is interesting to note, two of the films which achieved the greatest popularity there). *Henry V* was not received with the acclaim expected, although the Czechs themselves were ready to admit that the sub-titling might have been responsible for this. It requires full concentration to take in Shakespeare's lines to the full when they are spoken in English, the language in which they were written, but to expect the Czechs to get their full value after they had been translated and were being projected in rapid succession in sub-titles was, perhaps, asking too much.

An interesting item of the yearbook is R. W. Dickinson's report on the development of 16mm. film, which is followed by a note on the same subject by the editor. Whether it will ever supersede standard-size 35 mm. in all cinemas, as Dickinson suggests, is a debatable point,

but there is no doubt that it has come to stay, and more and more people are using it in schools, film societies and home movies.

The reference section of *The British Film Yearbook* lists the feature films released during the past year, the main documentaries, and some short films : "featurettes" as they are called. There are also lists of production and distributing companies, the film studios—far more than there used to be—the names of all producers, directors, associate producers, screenwriters, cinematographers, art directors, designers, still photographers, composers, musical directors and editors. Mr. Noble also includes the names of the leading sound engineers, film publicists, and those in charge of casting. Finally, there is a list of forthcoming films for 1947–48, and in what must assuredly be one of the most detailed compilations of its kind ever assembled by one person, the 180-page biographical index of every man and woman of importance connected with the British motion picture industry.

Over sixty pages of stills give a detailed pictorial record of the past year's highlights, both feature and documentary. In all, this is a book nobody interested in the English cinema can afford to be without. *The British Film Yearbook* paved the way for several other works on the same subject, but not one, as yet, has equalled it. On British films Peter Noble's yearbook is still both the first word and the last.



## New Contributors

**JULIA SYMMONDS** : is by way of being a discovery of the editor. Her erudite review of "Day of Wrath" in "FILM SURVEY" aroused considerable interest, and her work will be appearing in "FILM QUARTERLY" publications in future. She has contributed to "Stage and Screen," and to the anthology "The Art of the Cinema"; and a collection of her film writings will shortly be published by "FILM QUARTERLY."

**HAROLD LANG** : Actor, producer and poet. Born in London twenty-three years ago, he won the Bancroft Prize at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1942. Since then he has acted and produced at Henley, with the West Riding Theatre, and in London at the Gateway. He appeared at the Arts Theatre in the First Festival of English Comedy and also acted in "Hamlet" for the Old Vic. Recently he has been touring Italy, playing the leading roles in "The Corn Is Green" and "The School For Scandal." A great admirer of Cocteau, he is negotiating to produce a new Cocteau play in London next year.

**HARRY WILSON** : Born 1919, he has been a journalist and critic for ten years. He was a film reviewer in the provinces before the war, and served six years in the Army. He has contributed to "Sight and Sound," while his study of Alfred Hitchcock was recently published in "Film Miscellany." An admirer of Fritz Lang, he will also contribute critical studies of Orson Welles and Marcel Carné to future "FILM QUARTERLY" publications.



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